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ARGOSY

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Volume 301 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 31, 1940 Number 5

Minions of Mercury—*First of five parts*.....William Gray Beyer 2
Detroit (A D 7952 Edition) is running around in circles—following the commands of men long dead and threatening chaos to the world. Enter Omega, swooping from the clouds with Mark Nevin flying behind him

Forgotten Island—*Short Story*.....Allan Vaughan Elston 24
More dreadful than a murderer at bay is the remorseless robber of the coconut palms

Buckshot for Henry—*Second of three parts*.....W. C. Tuttle 33
It's open season on Easterners, shotguns are loaded with silver, and Henry's glad to be an ex-sheriff

Wilderness Way—*Novelet*.....C. F. Kearns 52
Back in the cold fastnesses of Noname Lake is something worth mushing a long way for. But anybody who wants it must be tougher than Handsled Burke and Two-horse Swen

Fifteen Dollars Every Friday—*Short Story*.....Fred Engelhardt 78
Lift the mortgage on the old homestead—lift it with stolen bonds and dynamite

Destination Unknown—*Third of five parts*.....Richard Sale 91
Do you know your cargo, Captain? It includes a good-sized shipment of calamity—very salable

Water Flows Downhill—*Short Story*.....Jim Kjelgaard 106
Johnny rode off with the gold and the food, but not with Old Dad's wit—and that was too bad

Argonotes 111

Looking Ahead! 111

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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Minions of Mercury

By WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

Author of "Minions of the Moon," "Minions of Mars," etc.

FOREWORD

Given an overdose of an untried super-anesthetic, Mark Nevin went into slumber that lasted for six thousand years. While he slept, there were wars; the civilization Mark knew disappeared; and mankind reverted to savagery.

Mark might well never have awakened had not Omega, an omnipotent but prankish disembodied intelligence, roused him to become the father of a new and better race. Mark chose Nona as his mate, and Omega introduced radioactive elements to their blood, protecting them from fatigue, hunger, and pain.

After a series of adventures, Mark and Nona settled down with the neo-Vikings of the North. Twelve years went by. . . .

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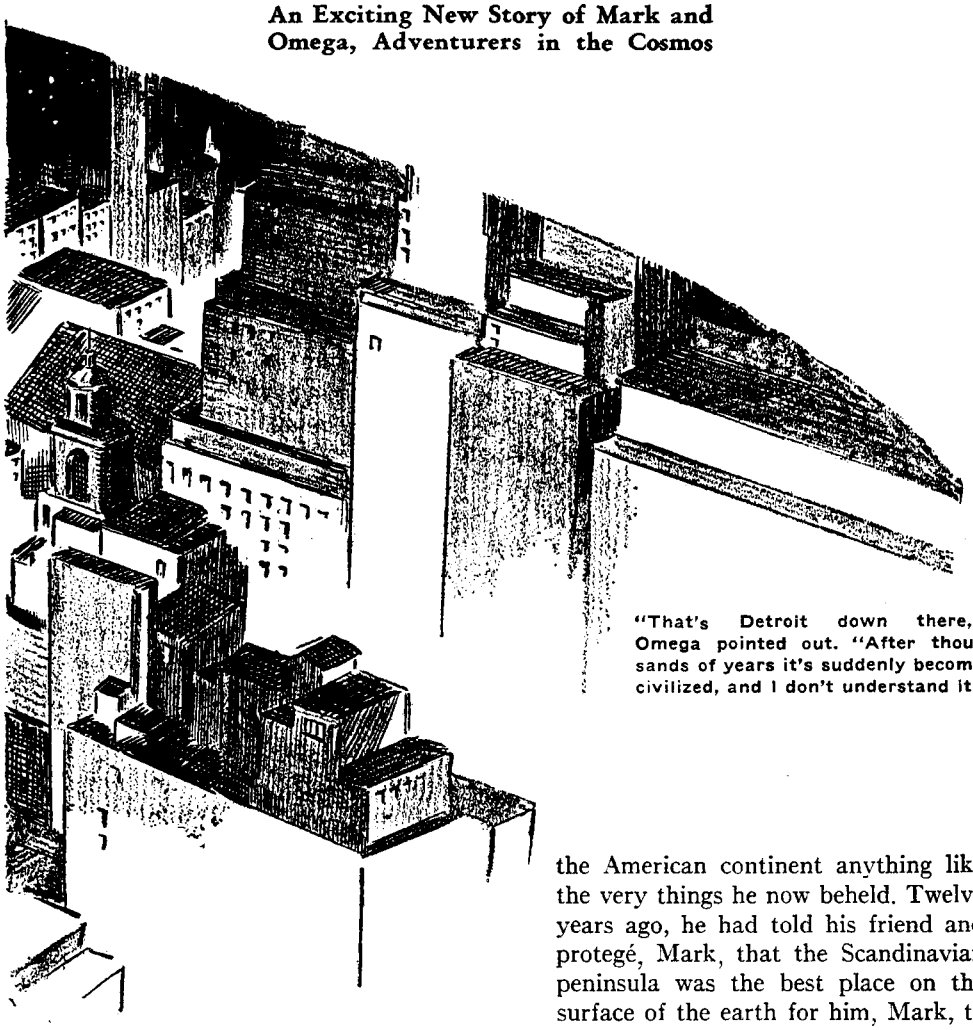
An Exciting New Story of Mark and Omega, Adventurers in the Cosmos



"That's Detroit down there," Omega pointed out. "After thousands of years it's suddenly become civilized, and I don't understand it"

CHAPTER I

THE HEAVENLY VISITOR

AT FIRST, Omega was slightly puzzled, Since Omega's intellect was practically all-powerful—since in fact, Omega was in reality nothing *but* intellect, a vast, disembodied and slightly irresponsible brain-wave, bewilderment was an almost unheard-of experience for him. But now he could have sworn . . . In fact it had only been a short twelve years ago when he had sworn that nothing existed on the American continent anything like the very things he now beheld. Twelve years ago, he had told his friend and protegé, Mark, that the Scandinavian peninsula was the best place on the surface of the earth for him, Mark, to establish residence.

He had assured Mark that nowhere in America, or what was left of it, was there a vestige of the civilization Mark had known in the days before his six-thousand-year long sleep, a cat-nap caused by an enterprising twentieth century surgeon's maladroit use of a super-anesthetic. When Mark came to, the largest portion of America's inhabitants were savage nomads, some of them cannibals, and the rest of them lived in a more or less feudal condition in the walled cities which were thinly scattered

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throughout the continent. Omega had been sincere when he had advised Mark to make his home among the Vikings of Norway.

Omega had always taken an interest—sometimes beneficent, sometimes merely meddlesome—in Earthly developments. As Luna was his birthplace, it was natural to consider Terra as his real home, now that its satellite was cold and dead.

Yet here, on Earth, something was going on that he had missed—an unforeseen development that bordered on the impossible. Omega thought back to the time when he had visited this place. He remembered distinctly that the city had been in a very low state of social development at the time. It was just another feudal town of the many that had sprung up amid the ruins of the civilized communities of the twenty century. Ruled by an iron-fisted despot, it had been plunged in tyranny and squalor when he had last seen it. It had been one of the worst of the lot, in fact. There had been many others with better government and more enlightened laws. More enlightened, that is, for the times.

Omega did whatever a disembodied intelligence could do in the way of frowning with thoughtful effort.

The solution came when he realized that it had been more than a thousand years since he had been here. Time certainly did fly, he thought, happy in his coinage of a phrase. He remembered the progress, both social and scientific, which had been made in shorter periods during the history of mankind. And while it was apparent that other cities in America had remained at a standstill, it was understandable that one of them hadn't.

THAT definite progress had taken place was easy to see. Factories had sprung up and were puffing up smoke at a furious rate. Vehicles were moving along the streets, and they weren't drawn by horses. Idly Omega noted that none of these was traveling in or out of the city, though several wagons pulled by teams of horses were. Yet the roads leading through the gates were smooth and capable of carrying autos.

Further, he noted that most of the horseless vehicles were trucks, designed for freight, rather than passengers. Evidently these people didn't consider that the best use of an automobile was to get them away from the city. No . . . They wouldn't, naturally. The walls explained that. Outside the city lurked danger, in the form of roving bands of nomads. Though it did seem queer that when some of the inhabitants did venture out, they preferred horsepower to swifter ways of travel. Unless, for some reason, the people of this city didn't want their advancement known to the rest of the world.

Detroit had been the original name of the city below. Possibly that was the reason for the sudden progress. Detroit had once been a great industrial center, chiefly inhabited by those engaged in large-scale manufacture.

It was conceivable that the descendants of these people were slightly different from the inhabitants of other cities. Their ancestors had been skilled workers, technicians and engineers. There was a tendency for such skills to be inherited. Then again, technical treatises and books on science and physics and chemistry might have escaped destruction during the last great war.

These might well have been discovered and deciphered by the descendants of the men and women who had originally used them. And that, no doubt, coupled with natural inherited tendencies, had enabled the new city of Detroit to show such amazing progress since he had last observed it.

With Omega, curiosity was a vice. He decided to investigate. First, he set about whipping himself up a human body to inhabit. He could just as well have descended into the city as the invisible thought-pattern that he was, and thereby have roamed freely about, observing without being seen; but that was not his way.

He preferred to get his information as a man would get it, by mingling with the people he wished to observe. A man can learn more about a man than can all the disembodied intelligences in existence, for

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the hearts and souls of men cannot be felt and known merely by the processes of the brain.

So Omega created his body—a decrepit and ancient one, with a wrinkled face and wise old eyes—by the direct mental manipulation of the vast energies which pervade all space. Courtesy and discretion caused him to perform the operation at some distance outside the city walls. Then, with tottery steps, he proceeded, with the aid of a cane—literally, an after-thought—toward the nearest gate in the wall.

As he neared it, two men appeared atop the barricade, one on each side of the gate. They were archers; and they were obviously going to make a fuss about letting him in.

"Halt!" cried the hefty one. "Why do you seek entrance?"

"Because I want to be inside, butterball," answered the ancient in a surprisingly hearty voice.

The guards looked at each other, and then the skinny one nodded. As if this was a signal, the other quickly fitted an arrow to his bow and let fly at Omega. The arrow sped true to the mark, in this case, approximately the pit of the aged man's stomach. As it struck, the ringing sound of a gong was heard, and the arrow shivered to bits.

"One cigar," remarked the old one. "How about opening that gate?"

THE archer looked puzzled, then assumed prayerfully that Omega wore some sort of armor under his ragged clothing. Grinning, he reached behind him and produced a high-powered rifle. Omega wondering vaguely why he hadn't used this in the first place, watched the man take careful aim at the central portion of his spurious and non-essential anatomy. This time the sound of the gong and the flat crack of the rifle shot came together. Omega shook his head, grumbling.

"Phooey," Omega said, with dignity. "What manners! You need a lesson, Hawk-Eye." Then he went into action. Taking a short run he made a prodigious leap and landed beside the dumbfounded guard.

"I hate being shot at so early in the morning," growled the ancient. "Give me that!"

The guard, his coarse jaw sagging, handed over the gun, without argument. He had made the fatal but perfectly understandable error of looking into the eyes of the old one; and after that his will was not his own. Omega took a look at the rifle. It resembled a model that had seen wide usage during the great war which had finally wrecked civilization. Smokeless powder had been used in the cartridges; and that didn't fit in with Omega's theory about inherited knowledge. Detroit had never been a munitions town, though it had experienced, and disastrously, the results of their manufacture. The gun itself held the answer to the puzzle. Bolt for bolt, and screw for screw, it was the exact duplicate of the actual guns which had been used in the last war.

If the thing had been something close to the original, he would have said that it represented a development of modern times. But this was *too* close for that. It was a copy, if it was not actually one of those in use over six thousand years ago, and preserved in some miraculous fashion to the present day.

Omega dropped the weapon and turned to the guards, just as the skinny man, who had not yet felt the power of Omega's mind, was drawing a careful bead on him with another gun.

"This is too much, really," Omega said and froze the man with his finger tight against the trigger. "Mustn't shoot people in the back. Didn't your mother ever teach you that?"

Gently, he probed the man's mind. Gently, because with the full force of his vast mental power, a weak human brain would be burned out in an instant. And this didn't look like a particularly bright specimen.

Surprisingly he learned that the man's mother *had* taught him not to shoot people in the back. She had, in fact, taught him to be a pretty good boy. Omega noted, still more puzzled, that the man wasn't essentially vicious. He really was an exemplary citizen. Nor could Omega, at first, find anything to account for his inhuman and un-

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reasonable actions. Then he found it, stuck way down at the bottom of the man's subconscious, tucked away under a lot of old inhibitions and report cards. The man had a fixation, probably hypnotically induced.

But try as he might he could find no memory, conscious or subconscious, of the identity of the person who had imposed the fixation. There was merely the post-hypnotic command that the guard should open the gate to no one but those citizens who were able to give the proper passwords. Others were to be killed summarily. Arrows were to be used for the purpose unless they failed because of distance or armor.

Further, the rifles were never to be used in cases where their use might be observed by strangers too far away to be killed instantly.

CHAPTER II

METROPOLIS, 7952 A.D.

OMEGA shook his head and turned to the other man. But he found the same thing there. Except that the skinny man was claustrophic and had a mother complex. Neither man had any awareness of the hypnosis. Both would act normally up to the moment when someone unauthorized attempted to enter the gate. Then they would obey the hypnotic command.

Irritably and with a certain pettishness, Omega erased the influence of the former hypnosis, and replaced it with a command of his own: the guards were to open the gate freely to anyone who might approach. He chuckled to himself as he floated gently down from the top of the wall, into the city.

Omega noticed a change from his last visit. Then the city had been surrounded by miles of tilled and cultivated soil. Hundreds of soldiers were on constant guard duty throughout the area, protecting the fields from raids by savage nomads. But now the outposts of the city were on the walls themselves. The surrounding fields were no longer in use.

Just inside the walls of the city there lay a narrow strip, no more than a half-mile wide, which seemed to be intensely cultivated. A half-mile by about twenty miles—hardly enough to feed a city of such size. Omega noticed pipe-lines for irrigation. A constant mist seemed to be rising from these. He also noticed that at regular distances, on the city side of the narrow strip, were tall, windowless towers, surmounted by what appeared to be immense concave mirrors, pointing downward and outward over the cultivated area.

Omega decided that this needed looking into.

The nearest tower was a short distance away. He hobbled to its base and found a small, locked door. A push of a finger opened it. Its simple lock presented no difficulty to one whose vision was not limited to a medium with so many drawbacks as light, which refused to turn corners or penetrate through such porous materials as wood and iron.

When occasion demanded Omega could see, or hear, or feel, over such diversified media as cosmic rays, ultra violet, sonic waves and even gamma rays, all of which he could manufacture as needed.

The tumblers of the lock yielded instantly to his mental burglary and he mounted the pair of stairs which he found directly behind the door. He groaned as his creaky joints made audible protests. Omega delighted in an acting ability that was, if nothing else, unique. He lived his rôles.

A HEAD poked forth from the top of the stairwell, and a pair of eyes widened in surprise. "I must have forgot to lock the door," muttered the head. Then aloud, "What do you want, old one?"

"A cup of coffee and a piece of apricot pie, please," said Omega amiably. A taste for apricots ranked high after curiosity in a list of Omega's vices.

"Never heard of either," said the man at the top. "You'd better get out of here. It's against the rules to allow anybody near the growth projector. Dangerous, too. There's leakage around that mirror, and it does something to your insides. We have

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to work in short shifts on account of it."

"I'm an old man anyway," remarked Omega as he puffed up to the top and gazed at a roomful of machinery. "What's all this?"

"That's the machine that makes the growth ray," the man answered. "It's tuned to the potatoes. Turns out a new crop every two days. They dig them out at night, when the ray's shut off. Say, you must be a stranger in this city!"

"You couldn't tune it to apricot pies, I don't suppose. No. Pity. Great town you have here," Omega said, shifting his attention from the machinery, which he didn't understand, to the projection ray itself. He analyzed that briskly and identified it as a wave he had run across once before. It had been used by a highly advanced race living on one of the planets which encircled a sun a few hundred light-years distant. The ray was the result of a highly developed civilization, and he wondered at its presence here on a benighted earth.

"Down there," his guide went on, "are the pipelines which furnish the plants with water. Dissolved in the water are all the minerals needed to replace those that the plants take from the ground. Great invention. Vargo's work."

Omega noticed a slight spasm of pain cross the man's face as he talked. Curious, he probed with his versatile vision, into the man's body. He was disgusted to see a malignant, cancerous growth at work in the abdomen. Delicately he removed the growth, destroying it utterly, and healed the tissues which it had damaged.

"You'd better quit this job and get another," he advised, sounding like a personnel manager.

The man's face registered something akin to horror. "No, no!" he protested. "This is my life's work. I love it! It makes me mad that they won't let me stay here all the time. But two hours is the limit. And I guess they're right," he said, regretfully. "It seems that if a man stays here much longer, the leakage of the ray causes funny things to happen inside him."

Omega nodded. "There was an extremely funny thing inside of you, a minute ago. How long have you been doing this?"

"Four years."

There were some other things that Omega was curious about and he decided that questioning was too slow. The man stiffened when Omega looked deeply into his eyes. But Omega found practically the same thing that he had seen in the other two. This man was also under the influence of hypnosis. He firmly believed that he enjoyed the monotonous job of directing the growth ray. Yet there was no record in his brain of the identity of the one who had impressed this belief.

Omega did, however, discover one other fact. Each boy and girl of the city was given a fair education, and upon graduation was sent to a governmental unit which decided, ostensibly, what aptitudes were present and what line of work should be followed. Appropriately, this was called the Vocation Board. Training for the chosen profession followed. It was at this point, most likely, that the hypnotic suggestion had been planted.

In one way, Omega reflected, the practice was beneficial. It certainly made for satisfied and happy workers. But on the other hand it was tough on the lads who were given jobs like this one. Nor did it fall under the scope of Rugged Individualism, or the Democratic Principle.

OMEGA frowned, mentally of course, as the thought came that Mark wouldn't like it. And after all this was Mark's world, whether he wanted it or not. Omega had made him a present of it with fixtures and good will included, and it was up to Omega to see that it stayed the way Mark liked to have it. He decided to look a little further, before setting the machinery in motion which would bring this state of affairs to Mark's attention.

He restored the man's consciousness and bade him a cheerful goodbye. The growth-ray operator didn't know it, but he now had another four years or so to enjoy his occupation. But then, he probably hadn't realized that his life expectancy had been

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numbered in days before Omega had run across him.

Omega penetrated deeper into the city, pausing from time to time, in an effort to satisfy his curiosity. The further he penetrated, the more puzzled he became.

There were a great many things which showed signs of being the result of unnatural progress. Others were normal developments of the millennium since he had observed the city. Multi-storied buildings could be expected, inasmuch as the city had not spread outward. Upward growth was normal, for a knowledge of engineering would develop during the same centuries which doubled and trebled the population.

In the matter of mechanical development, the city was in almost the same stage as it had been before the great war which destroyed it.

Omega became annoyed, as the day grew older, at his inability to ferret out the facts he sought. But so complete is the loss of memory incurred when a post-hypnotic suggestion commands that the subject forget, that even Omega's great mind couldn't bring the forgotten facts to the fore. Knowledge of the hypnotist's identity had been erased so thoroughly that it might as well have never existed.

With his annoyance came a certain amount of alarm.

Several times he had noticed a trace of something sinister in the course of his mental probing. Most of these happy people, though quite carefree and friendly, had a fixation that it was their destiny to some day spread out and conquer the surrounding cities of the country—and eventually the entire world!

There was no malice in the thought. There was no picture in their minds of the horrible bloodshed and privation such a course would bring. There seemed to be only the altruistic desire to give the rest of the world the benefit of their own economic and social progress.

Omega, for the sake of his own curiosity, set out to find the headquarters of the Vocation Board. There, he knew, would be the answer to the whole puzzle.

As he searched, his mind dwelt upon another matter entirely. Mark, of course, would have to straighten things out in Detroit. On the other hand, there were certain matters a little closer to Mark's own home which needed straightening out also. Mark's two kids weren't getting any younger, and the race must be perpetuated. . . . Maybe these two jobs could be dovetailed.

CHAPTER III

THE CASE OF THE CHINESE WHALE

THE North Atlantic, usually a pretty tempestuous stretch of water, was on its good behavior. Mark stood, legs braced, at the wheel of his ship and wondered why he should be having so much trouble on such a fine day.

There was a steady breeze from the stern and absolutely no reason why the boat shouldn't sail itself. But it wasn't doing that, not by a long sight. On the contrary, it was pitching and yawing as wildly as if it had encountered a typhoon.

Mark didn't know what to make of it. And it wasn't the only thing he had to bother him. Most important was trying to decide why he had ever left home at all. Things had been going along quite satisfactorily, and there was no valid reason why he should have left his happy home. He suddenly realized, spinning the wheel viciously to offset a nasty tendency his ship seemed to have acquired to head in the general direction of the north pole, that although he had invented several reasons why he should make a trip across the Atlantic Ocean, none of them amounted to a hill of beans.

That yarn he had told Nona, for instance.

"What do you want to go there for?" she had demanded. "There's nothing in America."

"You just don't know anything about it," he had told her. "The country as a whole, I mean. Sure, you know your home town and a bit of the surrounding territory, But America's a big place."

"But the Vikings," Nona had reminded

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him. "They're supposed to have seen a lot of it. They didn't think much of it."

"I've investigated that," he'd told her. "None of them ever got in more than a few miles, so that doesn't mean much. And they never really found anything even about the people they raided. They just grabbed and bashed worthy citizens in the head and ran. And those squareheads aren't competent observers."

"I thought you liked them."

"I do. But does that mean that I think they qualify as sociological experts!"

"How about your work?" she had asked, sharply.

That had almost stumped him. But he'd risen beautifully to the occasion. "I've gone far enough for the present. These people are still semi-barbarians, you know. And it wouldn't be safe to push them too fast. Social and economic progress should keep pace with mechanical advancement. I've already inaugurated too many twentieth-century ideas.

"The candlemakers guild has been on my neck ever since I built that generator with the waterpower turbine, and electrified the city. I tried to get them to change their vocation and take up the manufacture of electric lamps, but they tell me they can't make them out of whale blubber, of which they have a monopoly. Things like that are getting me down."

THE discussion had gone on like that for quite a while, until Nona had finally seen that, even with logic and reason to back her up, she was on the losing side. Mark was practically perfect—but he was after all, A Man. She'd stretched herself in front of a full-length mirror and then scowled ferociously.

"Never try to cramp their style, my mother always said," she observed tartly. "They'll come back, sooner or later, and when they do, he'll love you twice as much!"

"I hope your mother had better command of her pronouns," he snapped. Then he softened. "Don't get the notion that I want a vacation from you. I could manage that without crossing any oceans. Some of these Svenska girls are very cute, I've been told. And don't make faces. I've got a real reason for this trip. Scandinavia, you know, is a very small portion of the world. And Omega intends that our descendants eventually take over the entire globe. So it is my plan to establish myself in a section of the western hemisphere. Dominate it, if necessary, and advance the civilization of that portion to a point where our immediate descendants can settle and multiply in comparative safety.

"It's my job to provide several progressive communities, just as we've done here with the Vikings. We can't disappoint Omega, you know."

"That old goon," Nona grumbled. Then she'd smiled, and they'd kissed, and after an appropriate interval, everything had been all right again.

Some of the things he'd told Nona, even though they were spur-of-the-moment inventions, were good ideas at that. For one thing he *had* been pushing the Norsemen too fast. Occasionally he had gummed up the machinery of local economics. Progress had to be made slowly.

The business of the healers had proven that. But fortunately he had seen it in time. He hadn't gone ahead and explained about germs and told them to forget all about evil spirits. The healers—venerable sages all—would have placed him in the booby-bin, even if they had to build one especially for the occasion.

But while he had had to handle them with kid gloves, he'd made considerable progress there, even so. He had proven that there was more than one kind of sickness, and that different types must be treated in different ways.

He'd showed them that the evil spirits which caused scurvy couldn't be handled in the same manner as the demons who took refuge in wounds and animal bites. Whereas one group of spirits had to be propitiated by feeding the victim certain greens, the other must be dealt with firmly, even brutally at times. That sort of teaching had been well received and quite a few prospec-

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tive corpses had recovered to go forth in their ships and make corpses of others.

Another good idea, Mark recalled as he fought with the wheel, had been the one about his project to provide another place for his descendants to live and thrive.

Twelve years ago, when Omega had awakened him from the nap which had taken him six thousand years and had supplied his blood with a radioactive element that rendered him immune from fatigue and all but invulnerable to ordinary injuries, he had told Mark that he'd only done so with the idea of starting a new race on the earth. He had taken Nona, a normal girl, and changed her physical chemistry so that she was capable of perpetuating the new race. He had chosen her because her innate characteristics were of the same high type as Mark's.

Their children would inherit none of the greed and lust for power which had caused most of the wars that invariably had stunted man's growth, for the simple reason that neither of them possessed any tendencies in that direction.

Physical and mental strength, coupled with an almost immortal longevity, would be their tools. But, and Mark knew that this was his job, a start must be made in several spots on the earth's surface at the same time.

FURTHER cogitation was interrupted by the increasing necessity of keeping every sense alert to prevent his tiny craft from overturning completely. And now his tenancy of this particular part of the ocean was being disputed by a group of ferocious and apparently simple-minded whales. In spite of the fact that they could have picked any of several thousand square miles in which to swim, they perversely kept bobbing up right in the path of Mark's craft. Making faces at him.

Each and every one of them carried a gross tonnage which would have made a collision fatal. And final. With no concept of the laws of traffic or courtesy, they refused to stay put long enough for him to steer his way through them. They would make sudden dashes across his bow, apparently trying to see how close they could come without actually capsizing him. No doubt it was great sport for the whales, but Mark couldn't see any humor in it.

"Go away, you stupid fools. Get out of here," Mark bellowed.

Tremendous waves, caused by their passage, kept him fighting vainly for control of the boat. His craft bobbed like a cork in a hurricane. The beasts seemed to have no sense of propriety. No sense at all, in fact. They spun madly and kept returning for another try. There were still as many in front of him as there had been when he first sighted them.

"And you," he called to the one who seemed to be leading the cotillion, "stop making those insane faces. Don't leer at me—" He broke off, for he was almost sure that a whale never leers. Though, of course, he might be mistaken. His experience with whales was quite limited.

The feeling, however, persisted. Whales just did not behave like this. They were too darned big to be so playful. Dignity, he presumed, should be present in direct ratio to the volume. Pixies, for instance, had practically no dignity at all, while elephants were crawling with it. A whale, therefore . . .

The thought congealed considerably when one of the beasts, a very large one, placed itself directly in the path of the boat, and opened its mouth. Mark heaved mightily on the wheel and managed to steer past it. His whole craft could have passed within that mighty maw. Mark immediately revised his cynical ideas about Jonah.

He noticed that as he passed the monster, it snapped its mouth shut and looked decidedly chagrined. And Mark was absolutely certain that whales weren't capable of that emotion. An embarrassed whale. The idea was appalling. And silly. That whale was either polluted or—

Sighing unhappily, Mark relinquished his hold on the spokes of the wheel. He staggered to the rail and waited for developments. They weren't long in coming. With derisive flirts of their tails, the entire school

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of overgrown aquatic animals sounded, disappearing in unison.

With their going, the sea calmed abruptly and the boat settled down. Mark waited, halfway between resignation and anger and a kind of nervous dread. Resignation, because he hadn't really expected that things would be peaceful as long as they had; anger because of the silly trick that had been played on him, dread because he was sure that Omega was in the vicinity. Only Omega could have caused the peculiar activities he had just observed.

He looked out over the sea, expecting the disembodied intelligence to make his appearance in the guise of a crackpot sea monster of some sort, but nothing like that occurred.

HE WAS on the point of concluding that perhaps the whales had been genuine after all, when he heard a voice from the direction of the wheel.

"Ain't you-all gwine ter say hello?"

Mark wheeled. And sow, not a lovable old darky with a refreshing mint julep in either hand, but a distinctly sinister Oriental who probably could have scared the pants off Fu Manchu.

"H'y'all, honey chile?" inquired the mandarin.

Marked groaned. "That's terrible. That corny accent. No Southerner ever says you-all to just one person. I know because I went around with a girl from Alabama," —he blinked—"six thousand years ago. . . . What do you want?"

"I want to show you something, Detroit."

"I've seen it," Mark replied glumly. "Oho—it was *you* that made me think of this goofy trip, was it?"

"I had nothing to do with it, son. I just happened to observe something that ought to be corrected."

Mark nodded. "It's always that way," he said. "Well, what is it? What's the matter with Detroit?"

"Don't know exactly," confessed the Oriental. "But it's something that needs looking into. Detroit has suddenly become civilized!"

Mark raised an eyebrow, but held his peace.

"Yep. Truly civilized," continued Omega. "They've got to the point where they can't wait any longer. They've just got to give the world the benefit of their culture. Even if they have to shoot everybody who doesn't agree with them, in the process. And that's the final proof of a human civilization. The Romans did it, if you remember. So did the Persians and the Greeks."

"I wasn't there," denied Mark. "Besides, they were a bit primitive."

"They were human," Omega said. "And I *was* there. Identical species of animal, I assure you. And incidentally, you Americans had the same altrustic tendencies, you know. You weren't satisfied till you had civilized the Indians, though you had to feed half of them firewater and murder the other half."

"Let's talk about Detroit," said Mark. "Didn't I hear you say something about shooting? They've developed guns, eh?"

"Yeah, and a lot of other things. But I'd rather not tell you about it. You can see for yourself. This planet is your job, not mine. I'm just a spectator—I hope."

"You're an instigator," accused Mark. "But has it occurred to you that there are something like four thousand miles between here and Detroit? By the time I get there the war will be over."

"It hasn't started yet," Omega informed him. "And you're practically there now!"

Mark felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as the boat suddenly dropped out from beneath his feet! The mandarin and he, elbows locked, rose in the air to a height of several hundred feet and then sped forward at an alarming rate, directly away from the rising sun. Mark strove mightly to keep an expressionless face, but this experience was a little too trying for convincing calm. His eyes were streaming tears from the rush of air, but through the blur he could see the satisfied expression on the face of the Oriental.

The roaring, buffeting of the wind died abruptly. Mark understood that, even

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though he noted that their speed had apparently increased. The waves beneath were an endless, gray blur. Omega had merely included a portion of the surrounding air in the bubble of vibrant force which was carrying them along. It insulated them from the effects of their speed.

As they flew along Mark became aware of an acute and annoying humming sound. Under his breath the sinister mandarin was singing a few discordant bars of *Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny.*

"Michigan," Mark corrected hoarsely.

CHAPTER IV

CITY FOR MARS

"THIS," Omega finally explained, "is the type of thing you should be able to do yourself, instead of playing around with a primitive sailboat. This form of levitation and locomotion is the simplest manifestation of *telekinesis,* an ability which is inherent in every mind, even the humble human one. Look at the old Babylonian wizards. What brains they had!"

"Do you mean that there were better brains then than there were during the twentieth century?" asked Mark incredulously.

"Well," Omega started, "I'm not sure what *you'd* call better. They were better in certain respects, and not so good in others.

"They were able to utilize, to a certain extent, all the latent powers of their minds. They could control all the wave-bands of the phenomen known as *thought.* They were masters of *telepathy.* That's the second shortest of the thought waves. And they were masters of *hypnotism,* the longest of the thought waves. They could do a few things with *telekinesis,* also.

"Not much, I'll admit, considering the scope of that ability. They couldn't create matter from energy, or vice versa, but that was mainly because humans don't live long enough to fully develop their powers. But some of these wizards did learn how to transport themselves from place to place, which is more than you have done.

"Even so I'd hesitate to say that their minds were superior. You see, the civilization of the twentieth century concentrated on developing one portion of the mind, and they didn't do so badly—for humans.

"Your people far outstripped the Babylonians in reasoning power. You explored realms in which the Babylonian merely scratched the surface. Mathematics, astronomy, physics, and such. That is why your people built a mechanical civilization.

"But you were only tapping one band of the thought group, that of reason and logic. The complete intelligence should be adept in the use of *all* of the brain's powers. If you had learned to really control the *telekinesis* band, you wouldn't need your mechanisms, not even the simple boat. And you'd be able to create the most complicated structure, using only the boundless energy of space as your building blocks and tools."

For some minutes they rushed along in silence. In the distance Mark could see the shore line of America's Atlantic coast. He was about to speak when Omega interrupted the attempt.

"I hope that's sinking in," he said. "Twelve years ago I tickled that portion of your brain which emits the waves of *hypnosis.* How many times have you used the ability?"

"Four or five times," answered Mark. "But then there's been no need. I wouldn't use it on anybody except in an emergency. Wouldn't be fair."

"There you go, you ingrate! If you don't use it, you can't develop it. Not fair, eh? Well, for cat's sake. Was it fair for a brainy man to use his powers to acquire a fortune, when his less intellectual brothers starved?"

"That's different," Mark claimed. "That's ordinary competition."

"Ordinary competition, eh? If you ask me, it's just that one man used his equipment and the other was too lazy. But the point is that you have failed to exercise the ability I gave you. Yet I'll bet you're on the point of asking me to tickle the *telekinesis* portion of your brain, so that

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you can get about quicker. Well, I won't do it!"

MARK watched Mount Desert slide past beneath him. "Well I *was* going to ask you," he admitted. "But then this is not a thing which I'd have to use in competition with anyone. That's why I've seldom used hypnotism. In a fair fight each fighter has to have the same weapons. And that's a weapon the other fellow never seems to possess."

"You should be wearing your old schooltie, you Rover Boy." Omega chuckled. "Wait'll you get to Detroit," he said, enigmatically. "But you're all off again. *You* haven't fought a fair fight in years. *You've* always had an advantage.

"The other guy didn't have the kind of blood which would heal a wound instantly, did he? He didn't have muscles which were eternally rejuvenated by a radioactive element in his blood, did he?

"No, he got tired, like any weak human. He was licked before he started. You've got to get it into your head that all competition resolves iself into a battle between two *unequal* forces. The better equipped force wins, barring unforeseen accidents. And the weaker force invariably thinks it is the stronger, or it wouldn't seek a battle.

"So when you get embroiled in any sort of competition, always use every weapon you have. To do less only prolongs the agony of the other guy."

Mark listened, and in the main agreed, though with certain mental reservations. Though he had to privately admit that he had never fought anybody who didn't think he was a pushover. The apparent odds had always been on the other fellow's side. Which had conveniently removed Mark's scruples about taking advantage of his superior equipment.

"You know," said Mark. "This ability to move about at high speeds without an airplane would come in handy if I'm to keep an eye on developments here on the earth. Things like this Detroit business wouldn't be so apt to escape me."

"None of your Blarney," Omega snorted. "I won't lift a finger. You've got to develop it for yourself."

"But I don't know how to get started," Mark complained. "It's like trying to play a piano with your toes. Only a few people can do it, and yet all people have the proper muscles. The trouble is that they don't know how to use them. The nerves are atrophied, or something. Same thing with this *telekinesis*. You say my brain is capable of manipulating the energies of space. That may be so, fast enough, but I don't know how to do it. And I can't learn unless I get a start . . . I'll tell you—I'll make a bargain with you."

The Oriental features took on an interested expression. "I'se a listenin', white boy," said Omega.

"Will you cut that out? Well, when you gave me the use of that portion of my brain which emits hypnosis waves, you developed the faculty to perfection. All in one dose. I didn't have to do a thing. Now with this *telekinesis* faculty, suppose you just excite that region of my brain sufficiently for me to realize the sort of effort needed to exercise it. Then I'll do the rest myself. I'll develop it from scratch, without any more help."

Omega didn't answer immediately. "It doesn't seem quite like a bargain," he mused. "What do I get?"

"You gave me a job to do here, didn't you?" Mark pressed. "It was all your idea to provide Nona with the same kind of blood as mine, so that the earth would eventually become populated with a more durable species of human. And you've appointed me to see that things don't happen the way they always have when humans became wise enough to annihilate each other. So you should help provide me with the tools to carry out the project. You can't beat logic, you know."

"No, but you *can* twist it all out of shape," said Omego. "That's a habit of yours. . . . I don't know why I ever monkeyed in human affairs anyway. Once you start, you can't stop. All right, chucklehead, I'll operate on you."

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LAKE ONTARIO and Lake Erie had slid beneath as they talked, and Mark noticed that they were now poised almost directly above the Detroit River, once called the Dardanelles of the New World. On its western shore sprawled the new Detroit, and at the sight of it Mark forgot all about Omega's promise. For Mark had once, six thousand years before, flown in a transport plane over that city, and it had looked almost the same as it did now!

A sudden wave of nostalgia gripped him at the sight of factories belching smoke, and automobiles speeding along the broad streets. Since his awakening, twelve years before, he had only experienced this feeling a few times, and then he had been too busy to let it bother him. But then it was only his memory that had made him homesick.

Here was something much stronger. Here was an American city in full throb of prosperous industry. A piece of the twentieth century transplanted into the eightieth!

It was almost too much.

Omega must have sensed something amiss, for he took immediate action to cure the disease.

Mark felt a sudden rush of air, accompanied by the same all-gone feeling in the pit of his stomach which had accompanied his rise from the deck of the ship. But this time he was descending, and much faster than he had gone up. His course was a slanting one, aimed in the general direction of a building on one of the busier streets. Alarmed, he noticed that he no longer felt the restraining arm of Omega. Frantically he looked around.

Omega was gone!

HE EXPERIENCED an instant of panic as the building became larger and closer. Then he smiled, albeit a bit sickishly. Falling bodies went straight down—apparently, at least. He wasn't doing that, and therefore wasn't a falling body. His desecent was being directed. Which meant that his friend had merely abandoned his human form and was in his natural disembodied state.

Mark was right. His slanting course carried him down into the canyon of the street, barely clearing the roof of a skyscraper. "Whoops!" he yelped nervously. His descent became as vertical as the fall of a stone. Then, a few feet from the pavement, he stopped plummeting and went swooping through the doorway of a store on the street level.

He caught a fleeting vision of a sign which read *Apparel for Misses* and his heart sank. He knew what was coming as well as if he had seen a moving picture of it. For Omega had little respect for the conventions of humans. Anatomy was anatomy to him and gender merely an affectation.

This was bad!

Mark's blurring flight didn't stop in the store immediately until he had soared the whole length of the store and crashed through a French door at its end. He landed with grace and precision directly in the center of three ladies of almost certain age who were trying on various intimate items of women's apparel. Three screams in different keys rent the air as Mark wheeled like a dervish and made for the shattered door. He passed through it even faster than he had come in, pursued by outraged female yelps.

Mark slowed to a walk as he reached the street. Curious stares greeted him in the vicinity of the store-front, but as he walked down the street they died away and Mark breathed a sigh of relief.

"You applebrain!" came a harsh whisper in his ear. "I operated on you just before I dropped you. I gave you the power you asked for, and did you make the slightest use of it? Not you! The way you've started you'll never make even a halfway decent Mercury to my Jupiter. See if you can improve by the time I get back. And look out for Vargo! Whoever he is. Toodle-ooo."

THE voice trailed off in the sounds of traffic. Mark looked around him, observing the people who thronged the sidewalks. He was pleased to note that, con-

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trary to twentieth-century practice, the men were far more scantily clothed than the women. Since he wore nothing above the waist and only short leather breeches below, it was just as well that the male Detroiters were not turned out much more completely.

Because of the radio-activity of his blood, Mark wore the same garments, winter and summer. Trunks and a pair of sandals provided all the covering he needed or wanted. A broad belt, which holstered his axe and dagger, completed the costume.

It was warmish and most of the men he saw wore trunks, like his own. Some had belts, slightly narrower than his, which contained short-swords and automatic pistols. Soldiers or police, he decided. The others were unarmed.

Mark attracted little attention; but there were a few curious, even suspicious, looks directed at his axe. Axes evidently weren't standards weapons in these parts. More curiosity was evinced when people happened to notice his dented, but shiny, winged helmet. That, very likely, had no counterpart in the city of Detroit. But Mark was determined not to part with it, even if it did make him conspicuous. That helmet had protected his skull through through many a battle and he had a certain understandable attachment for it.

He was considering the possibility of passing himself off as one of the constabulary in order to pick up a few vital statistics; when the thing was settled for him. A young man equipped with short-sword, pistol and a smooth helmet which resembled the coal-scuttle variety used by the Germans in the first World War, stopped before him and respectfully saluted.

"I'm a recruit in the First Division, sir," he said, eyeing Mark's accoutrements uncertainly. "Can you tell me . . . You *are* an officer, aren't you?"

Mark smiled indulgently, his mind racing at top speed as he hesitated before answering. The man's clipped shorthand English was intelligible though it was quite changed from the twentieth-century language he had known. Mark knew that he could duplicate it without any trouble. He'd had a lot of practice in learning new dialects in the past twelve years. But the trouble was that he had no notion of what to say. He decided to take a chance.

"A commander, sonny," he answered. "Mercury Division. What's on your mind?"

THE man responded with a friendly, though slightly puzzled smile. "I haven't heard of that one, sir," he said. "Everything seems to be so upside down these days that nobody knows exactly what's going on. I guess that'll all be straightened out, though. But what I need to know is when I'm to report again. They shooed us out so quick when they issued our swords and guns, that nobody remembered to tell us. I tried to get back in, but when the guard saw my equipment he just waved me away. There was such a crowd at the recruiting station that I had to give it up. Do you know when we start our march?"

Mark nodded. "You'll be notified when to appear for further orders," he said. "You'll have to be trained a little, you know."

The man's eyes widened. "Trained? I never heard of that. I thought that we were to march in a week or so."

"Did you say you were just recruited today?" asked Mark.

The man nodded. "I understand the recruits are to be placed under the leadership of seasoned men from the caravan guards. They know how to handle the nomads and they will be our officers when we attack other cities."

Mark bit back his astonishment. Raw recruits sent to war, without training, with caravan guards as officers! An armed mob, nothing more.

Then Mark remembered the primitive state of the nomadic tribes which roamed the countryside, and decided that maybe an armed mob would do the trick nicely. On the other hand the nomads were fighters, and a good many of these recruits were sure to be slaughtered, even though they were armed with guns.

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"You'll be notified," he repeated. "Keep close to home."

"I hope it's soon," asserted the youth, an ecstatic expression on his face. "Our civilization will lift the world from savagery! This generation will go down in history. Vargo's name will be glorified forever. The Ancestors will be proud!"

CHAPTER V

THE ANCESTORS LIVE

MARK walked along and tried to make some sense out of what he had heard. The projected campaign was imminent, that seemed certain. Yet the whole affair seemed to be being slapped together in the most half-baked sort of way.

Could it be that the powers who were running the show, this Vargo for instance, had no conception of the necessary approach to a war of conquest? It certainly looked like it. Young men who probably had never handled a weapon in their lives were blithely babbling about conquering the world. Of course they might be able to pull it off, considering the guns and automobiles; but most of them would wish they had never heard of a war, before they were through.

Then there was that mention of the Ancestors.

The youth had pronounced the word with a decided degree of reverence. It had sounded to Mark like a form of religion, though ancestor-worship and progress never had gone hand-in-hand, as far as he knew. There was nothing to do but try to gather further information and improvise from there.

Mark, idly walking down the street and pondering his next move, fell to inspecting the types of cars and trucks which passed up and down the city's busy streets.

By the sound of the motors, they were almost all high-powered vehicles, yet there seemed to have been little attempt made on the part of the designers to make them look well. This may have been partly due to the fact that most of them were trucks and strictly utilitarian; but their design would make a Model T look like a gleaming Rolls by comparison. Even the passenger cars. They were all squarish, and built on the general lines of taffy boxes. Closer inspection made him think that this might be because of old-fashioned methods used in the stamping mills. The bodies weren't stamped in one piece, but rather were welded together from a dozen or more pieces.

Mark paused at the next corner and waited for a break in the stream of vehicles. Several others were waiting, more patiently than he. There seemed to be no traffic system worthy of the name. True, there was a policeman on the corner, but he seemed to be doing nothing in the way of giving the pedestrian even a good opening. He merely observed the movements of the vehicles and occasionally waved his hand to hurry the speed of a car or truck coming from the lesser-used side street.

But he made no attempt to halt traffic on the larger of the two streets. Cars on the smaller one sped across as the opportunity offered. As near as Mark could tell this larger street had a definite right of way over the smaller. And pedestrians had no rights at all. It wasn't so different from the twentieth century, and at least you knew definitely where you stood.

The policeman refused to do a thing to give them an opportunity to cross. Yet surprisingly, they didn't seem to resent this in the least. They appeared perfectly content to await their chance to make a dash for it.

MARK was suddenly distracted by a loud yell from the policeman. It was accompanied by lesser yells from several of the pedestrians. An old man, who had been waiting on the opposite side of the larger street, thought he saw an opportunity to scurry across. Several others took the same chance. But in the center of the street one of the younger men in the group jostled against the old one and tripped him.

The oldster fell heavily, directly in the path of a huge truck!

Squealing brakes mingled with the shouts of pedestrians. Mark didn't yell. He acted.

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With a speed born of tireless, steel-spring muscles, he leaped in front of the truck and snatched the old man to safety. He carried him to the pavement and stood him upright. He tried to inquire if the oldster had been hurt, but his voice made not a dent in the din raised by dozens of horns and a score or so of angry voices.

The horns subsided as the trucks hurried on. But the voices became louder. Mark, for a minute, couldn't make it out. The people, instead of being glad that the old man had escaped death, were angry that he had delayed traffic for an instant! The oldster cringed at their insulting tirades. Mark patted him reassuringly on the shoulder and turned to face the irate policeman who was approaching.

"Doddering old fool!" raged the cop. "If you're too feeble to cross a street, why don't you use the underpass?"

"Where's the underpass?" asked Mark, somewhat out of patience himself.

"A half mile up the street," quavered the old man. "A hundred steps down and then a hundred steps up again. My legs aren't up to it."

"Makes no difference," rasped the officer. "You'll face the tribunal for delaying traffic!"

A murmur of approval came from the crowd of onlookers as the cop reached forth a hand to take the old one's arm. Mark struck it away.

"Not so fast," he said. "The man was knocked down. He couldn't help delaying your precious traffic."

The cop flushed from his eyebrows to his short ribs, which were exposed.

"Wise guy, huh? Okay, for that I'll take you along, too. Assaulting an officer!"

The officer evidently thought his pistol would be needed for the job, for he began to draw it. That was a mistake.

In an instant he was flat on his back and Mark was dusting off his knuckles and grinning at the glazed look in the cop's eyes. The latter made an effortful and badly coordinated attempt to pull himself together, gave it up as a bad job, and subsided peacefully on the pavement.

Mark's grin faded at the sound of the gasp of horror which arose from the onlookers. He turned to face them, wondering what manner of people inhabited this modern city of Detroit. They certainly weren't behaving as normal urbanites. In his day a cheer would have greeted the manhandling of a cop who had acted like this one.

He noticed that the crowd was composed mainly of young people, with apparently only a few over fifty. These few, he was pleased to see, were smiling happily. The rest were frowning and muttering threateningly.

"You inhuman brats," Mark told the latter. "This old man might have been the father of any of you. Out of the way, now, or I'll lay some of you out beside the cop."

THE crowd parted reluctantly and he piloted the old man down the street. At the next corner he turned, looking back for an instant to see if there was any pursuit. There wasn't. Evidently the cop hadn't recovered and none of the others cared to invite similar treatment. He slowed his fast pace to allow the old man to catch his breath.

"Where are you headed for, Pop?" he asked. "I'll stay with you and see that you get there."

"Another block," said the oldster. "You took a terrible chance, young man. I'm very grateful. But more than that, I'm pleased. I thought that Vargo had stamped out such things as respect for one's elders. You must be a stranger in this city. What is your name? Mine is Dodd."

"Mark. And you're right. I am a stranger. But what's all this about a lack of respect for elders? I should expect the opposite. I heard some talk of ancestor worship in this city."

The old man shuddered. "The Ancestors!" he whispered, with something like loathing in his voice. "They're a blight on humanity! They fostered all this. They dream of a perfect world, yet they couldn't make a perfect one in their own time. Their progress is all a sham, a thing of no substance. It is bringing only misery, because

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it leads to the one thing that made theirs an imperfect civilization. War!"

As he said the last, the old man turned into the doorway of a two-story structure. A small sign, etched in brass, proclaimed that the place was a home for the aged.

Dodd led the way into a large room which looked like a combination library and recreation room. For an instant Mark fancied himself transported six thousand years into the past and set down inside a YMCA.

One wall was lined with bookcases, and scattered here and there were tables where men played chess, checkers and cards. The men were all aged, yet appeared like any similar group of his own time. There were kindly-looking men with silky white beards, crabbed-appearing ones, and tired, spiritless ones.

Here and there were notes of incongruity. The cards weren't the same as those of the twentieth-century sort, and the chess boards had twice as many pieces. And there were a few games that he failed to recognize at all.

Books, on the other hand, were the same. Probably the present-day civilization had developed along lines similar to his own because of the many things which had been salvaged from the ruins after the end of the last wars. The art of bookmaking may have been one of the salvaged processes. Though, of course, the thing might be an accidental development, the result of progress in similar peoples reaching approximately the same point.

"The men you see here," Dodd said, "number more than half of the completely sane and free mentalities in this entire city!"

MARK gazed about him, quite astonished. There weren't any more than fifty men in the large room. Some of them were looking at him in polite curiosity. Physically a young man, he did look out of place here in a roomful of the aged and feeble.

"Perhaps I'd better explain," said Dodd, indicating a chair.

"These men were in their forties when Vargo instituted his new idea of vocational training. And that is why they are among the few remaining entirely sane people in this city. Vargo . . ."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mark. "Let's start at the beginning. Who the devil *is* Vargo? I've been hearing a lot about that character."

Dodd made a wry expression. "Vargo, Giver of Life!" he said, sarcastically. "He's well on the way to becoming a god, right now. But those who knew him before he gained power consider him a grasping, egotistical tyrant. Something which should be eliminated for the betterment of the city.

"We, however, are in the minority. We number about a hundred as opposed to two million or so who think him almost divine.

"Our government used to be something on the order of those ancient republics you have probably read about. Our citizenry elected its king once every ten years. It did, that is, until Vargo came along. A business depression preceded his election, and his scientific methods ended it. He made drastic changes in social organization and in a very short time everybody was prosperous and happy. Happier than ever before. Result; no more elections. Vargo king as long as he lives."

Mark's eyebrows lifted as he waited for some more. But Dodd, with senile absentmindedness, seemed to have sunk into a gloomy reverie.

"Pardon me," ventured Mark, and waited until Dodd's eyes raised to regard him glassily. "Vargo—remember?"

"Yes . . . Vargo! The scheming, sadistic . . But you don't understand: We are not really prosperous. Our people are merely contented with much less than before. That is why they are happy. They don't have much, but they don't want much. Vargo has increased working hours and the people like it because everyone now enjoys his work! All they want is the opportunity to work longer hours, and they're deliriously happy about it!"

Mark shook his head and wondered if the old fellow had told the truth about the

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state of sanity of those who met in this room. Somebody certainly was crazy.

"Sounds like an unusual state of affairs," he remarked.

Dodd nodded gloomily. "It's not natural," he said, resentfully.

"You men don't happen to be oldtime union organizers, do you?" Mark inquired.

Dodd seemed to be mystified at this. Mark concluded that the present civilization hadn't got quite that far. And if everyone liked his work as much as Dodd claimed, unions would never develop.

"Just what is your main objection to this Vargo?" he asked.

Dodd looked at him in amazement. "Why, because he is responsible for all this. He brought the Ancestors to life. He caused our people to think of nothing but production, production, production . . . That's why I was almost arrested. I was delaying production.

"If I slowed a couple of trucks for a few seconds, the materials which those trucks carried would be a few seconds late in arriving. And the factories to which they were going would be a few seconds later in using those materials to manufacture guns and other war equipment. It's getting so that human life is nothing compared to high-geared production. And the people want it that way!"

Mark frowned. "Something's getting past me," he said. "Let's go back. What have the Ancestors to do with this? What did you mean by saying that Vargo brought them to life?"

A COMMOTION at the door prevented Dodd from answering. An elderly attendant raised his voice in quavering protest as several men pushed their way past him. Mark saw that they were police, or perhaps soldiers. Then he recognized the cop who had stopped his right hook. "That's him!" cried the policeman, pointing to Mark. "I remember that axe. And there's the old man, too."

Mark jumped to his feet as the police surged forward. He grinned as he noticed that there were only five of them. Fair enough odds, he thought. Should make a nice little pile on the floor.

But his grin faded when he saw them draw their pistols. He considered briefly the chances of dodging between bullets fired from five guns at once. Then he happened to think of the usual fate of innocent bystanders. That was really what made him raise his hands in surrender. He didn't relish the thought of any of the old men stopping a bullet intended for him.

Dodd was quivering with excitement as they were led toward a closed truck at the curb. Mark was slightly annoyed because he had permitted the officers to remove his weapons. But he consoled himself with the thought that he didn't really need them anyway.

"This is the last ride," Dodd quavered, as one of the police pushed him inside. "Vargo himself handles all cases involving malcontents. A thief would fare better."

Mark eased himself off a splinter in the rough bench, which ran the length of the truck's interior. This conveyance, he was thinking, was a poor imitation of the jiffy-wagons of the twentieth century.

For although they hadn't been exactly luxurious, they had at least been equipped with padding on the seats. And the springs had been better. But then, some of the best people had ridden in them. Maybe it was different now.

"Keep your chin up, Pop," he advised. "I was going to drop in on Vargo, anyway. By the way, we were interrupted. What were you going to say? About Vargo, you know, bringing the Ancestors to life . . ."

DODD shook his head wonderingly. "You're a strange man," he said. "Vargo is a scientist. He worked with electricity back in the days when little was known about it. I remember when he and I were in the same class in physics . . . But you wouldn't be interested in that . . .

"At any rate, Vargo discovered some kind of vibration which would reassemble the atoms of a decomposed body and bring it back to its original form. He did that when he was still in college. He had failures with-

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out number, producing freaks of all sorts. Foreign elements would be acted upon by his vibration and reconstruct all sorts of things within the bodies of the animals he experimented upon.

"For years none of them lived. He was finally successful when he turned his ray upon the contents of a bronze casket which had been dug up from one of the ancient cemeteries.

"A man was reconstructed, and he lived! Though he died shortly after from the effects of some copper oxide which had been restored within his body. The oxide from the casket had mingled with the remains of the body.

"And so, though he didn't give up, he met failure again.

"But Vargo was entirely successful when he tried his vibration on the contents of a casket made of one of the rustless steel compounds. That man became the first Ancestor. He restored others, five altogether, each one a specialist in some particular branch of science in which the ancients excelled. He put them to work, and they have done much to advance science and industry.

"Motor trucks have replaced horse-drawn vehicles within the city. Guns have come into existence. And about ten years ago one of the Ancestors invented the ray for forcing vegetable growth. Old-fashioned farming was abandoned, and we now grow enough to feed the city, entirely within the walls. Even the enormous quantities of vegetable matter that is fermented to produce the alcohol for the motors.

"Vargo took the credit for most of the work of the Ancestors, which they don't seem to mind, and as a result he was elected king. And he became so popular that no more elections have been held. For thirty years, during which time the face of the city has changed tremendously, he has used the science of the Ancestors to further his own ambitions."

The old man fell into a fretful silence, watching the progress of the patrol wagon through a barred window. Mark was equally silent, for there was a lot to think about.

CHAPTER VI

WITHOUT WINGS, YOU FLY

IT WAS almost too much to digest at one sitting. Especially considering the available accommodations for sitting. It was enough to give one an ache in various places.

Dead men brought back to life! Dead for quite some time, too. Living ancestors! And they actually were that, for the bodies had been dug up from the very graveyards which the remote ancestors of these people had used.

The mention of stainless steel caskets gave Mark to believe that the Ancestors must be from a period only slightly later than his own former existence. Rustless metals had come into wide usage during the years preceding the beginning of his long sleep. Therefore these Ancestors had lived sometime during that century, at the height of Man's conquest of Science. No wonder Vargo had put them to profitable use.

That raised another question. Why did they allow him to do so? Did Vargo's plans match their own aims? Or did he have some hold over them?

Mark was about to ask when the patrol wagon bumped over a curbing and heaved itself up a driveway. Dodd and he were kept covered by the policemen's pistols as they got out. Then they were herded through a door and down a corridor lined with cells. Mark frowned at the sight of them.

"Take us to Vargo," he demanded.

The answer to that was a sudden rush by three policemen, at the conclusion of which Mark found himself on the less pleasing side of a cell door. It clanged decisively shut. Decisively, that is, from the viewpoint of the police. Cell doors are supposed to be that way. This one, for some reason, wasn't. They were more than surprised to see it bounce open as quickly as it had closed! The foremost cop slammed it shut again, even harder than before. That was a tactical error, for it only bounded back harder. It caught him before he could get out of the way and knocked him flat.

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Mark stepped back, deeper into the darkness of his cell, and thus farther from the door. He didn't want to be in the way should it suddenly decide to swing inward. From his personal experience with cell doors he knew that they were unpredictable. Omega, you see, liked to play with them when he was around.

Mark remembered one which had turned a cherry red, and then melted at his feet.

This one, however, did not such a thing. It completed its swing, banged against the wall and then returned slowly and locked itself. The policemen, looking puzzled and pretty sullen, retired from the immediate vicinity, first cautiously closing the door of another cell on the unfortunate Dodd.

Mark listened to their footsteps march down the corridor and cease with the closing of a door at its end. "Come on, you old fox," he coaxed. "Make yourself visible."

"Haven't time," said a soft voice close to his ear. "I just dropped in to see how you're doing. And as usual, I find you in jail. What are you, anti-social?"

"They got a law here against socking cops," Mark explained.

"Narrow-minded, eh? What have you done about telekinesis?"

MARK groaned. "I was afraid you'd bring that up. Here it's been two hours since you allegedly operated on me, and I haven't done a thing. I can't even melt those cell doors. I guess I'm a failure."

"Two hours is a long time," Omega stated. "I went clear to Andromeda, several hundred light-years away, and back in that interval."

Mark affected a yawn. "Interesting," he commented. "And how are all the folks on dear old Andromeda? It's been quite some time since I've . . ."

"Cut it out, nitwit," Omega snapped. "I told you I'm short of time. But I just happened to remember that I didn't finish that operation."

"That's why I said 'alleged,' " Mark said. "I didn't feel anything."

"You wouldn't," said Omega. "I operated on that portion of your brain which controls the energies locked in the sub-etheric vibrations. You now have enough development to use them to move matter. That's all, though. I didn't develop it enough to allow you to create or destroy matter. You'll be able to do that yourself, if you practice for a few hundred years. But I forgot something. Remember the time I developed your hypnotic ability?"

Mark nodded, knowing that Omega could see him even though he couldn't see Omega.

"At that time," Omega went on, "I found it necessary to throw my own hypnosis wave against you in order to start you resisting me. That gave you the stimulus which enabled you to get the feel of handling your own wave. Now the point is, having developed your telekinesis center, how shall we stimulate it?"

Mark was stumped.

Years ago, before his blood had become the self-rejuvenating fluid he now possessed, it had been necessary for him to sleep. And he remembered that he used to dream. One of his most frequent dreams had been of flying. Sometimes he had done this by flapping his arms, as if they were wings. But more often he had just held his arms at his sides and wished—wished most mightily—that he were moving through the air. And he had moved.

He told Omega about it.

"That's no good," claimed Omega. "A race memory, nothing more. You humans were once flying reptiles, and you still wish you had wings."

OMEGA was silent for a few minutes after that. And being invisible, he seemed to have left entirely. Mark was on the point of calling to him when he felt himself rise a few inches from the floor. His arms churned for a moment as he felt himself tipping sideways. It didn't do any good; he still tipped. He buckled his knees, trying to reach the floor with his feet, but they stayed up.

He was about to relax and lean against the force which was keeping him in a slant-

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ing position, when abruptly it tipped him over in another position.

"No, you don't," came the voice in his ear. "Come on, use your brain. You're standing on a tilting floor and I won't let you off it until you manage to rise of your own accord. I won't let you fall, but I won't let you stand straight either."

The tilting position was doing something to Mark's sense of balance. Omega wouldn't keep him tilted in one direction long enough for him to get accustomed to it, and his stomach didn't like it a bit. Only the fact that he hadn't eaten anything for over twelve years kept it from turning over entirely. But that didn't prevent him from feeling quite dizzy and nauseated. He fought the sensation and tried to do something about it.

The effort was futile until he happened to think of his dreams. Then he tried placing his hands at his sides and wishing he could fly. That didn't work either. He stayed on the invisible, tipped platform.

Experimentally he closed his eyes and tried to capture the feeling he had experienced in his dreams. Wishing alone wouldn't do the trick, he realized. He remembered back to the days when he had dreamed those dreams. It had been during his life in the twentieth century. He hadn't slept once since that six-thousand-year nap.

Hazily, eyes still closed, he pictured those dreams. Always he had sensed a certain liquid quality in the surrounding atmosphere. Then he remembered clearly. Had that property of fluidity been a latent realization of the presence of those subcomic vibrations which abound in all space? Was it some race memory of a time when his ancestors had been able to utilize those waves? He didn't know, but tried mightily to recapture the sensation.

Possibly it was because his eyes were closed; possibly because Omega knew of his struggle and was helping, but in a few minutes he became aware of the liquid quality he sought.

Immediately he imagined himself rising, and then suddenly his eyes were jarred open by a resounding thump on his head. He had hit the ceiling! That little incident unnerved him to the extent that he lost all thought of his control of the levitation principle, and he crashed to the floor in a loose heap of arms and legs and angry curses.

The chuckle that came from the air near his left ear was hearty and appreciative. "Nice doing, son," Omega congratulated. "But you have to keep your mind on your work. Try it again, this time with your eyes open. You can feel the waves which surround you now. It'll be easy."

Mark scrambled to his feet, somewhat groggily. Omega was right. He could feel the waves.

Even with his eyes open and fully awake, he sensed that he was immersed in an all-pervading bath of cosmic emanations. That was the secret of the thing; the consciousness of those waves. Once you could feel them you could use them. Before he had been like a blind man, knowing that there was light but unable to see it.

Omega had made him able to see.

CAUTIOUSLY he willed to rise from the floor. Slowly but steadily the ceiling came nearer. Then he thought of stopping his ascent and moving horizontally. His body obeyed his will and approached the far wall. He stopped abruptly and descended to the floor, looking wildly around for Omega before he remembered that he was still disembodied.

"But I have no consciousness of directing these waves!" he said, excitedly. "I just thought of rising and the waves lifted me!"

"Sure, sure," said the voice, patiently. "When you want to wiggle your fingers, your brain doesn't consciously direct each action of all the muscles involved. You just think of it and they wiggle. A baby has to learn, of course, but after a few tries the muscles obey from force of habit. Trial and error in the beginning; later, habit.

"There is never any stage where the brain is completely conscious of all the movements of the muscles. When you move your wrist, for instance, a muscle in your forearm does the work, yet your brain isn't

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aware of it. When you take a breath you are really expanding your ribs by an action of the muscles between them. You don't suck the air in; the enlarged chest cavity creates a partial vacuum and the air rushes in because the pressure is greater outside.

"It's the same with *telekinesis*. With your consciousness of the waves comes the automatic ability to manipulate them. Later, of course, you may learn to sense some of the peculiar properties of those waves and make them do some of the things I can make them do. That, however, will take a lot of practice and you'll have to do it yourself. I refuse to help you any more!"

While Omega talked Mark exultantly wafted himself about through the air in his cell. He moved erratically, first with extreme caution, then with increasing confidence. In a minute or two he was darting from wall to wall and making abrupt turns at high speed. A bat could have done no better.

"What did my dreams have to do with it?" he finally asked.

"That's got me stumped," Omega confessed. "Fifty thousand years ago I left my body and started to roam around the universe. At that time the continent of Atlantis was going through the throes which resulted in its submergence to the bottom of the Atlantic. I never did get a chance to observe its peoples. Some of them escaped by reason of the fact that they were traveling in far lands at the time. They became your ancestors, no doubt.

"Maybe they had the power of telekinesis, later losing it from intermarriage with more primitive peoples and descending once again to savagery. That would account for your race memory of soaring. It's hard to say, though. Human history is so confusing. Nothing like my own people, who developed constantly as the Moon aged, from primitive organisms to highly intelligent beings. You humans have gone up and then down again so many times that it's hard to tell what may have happened."

Mark described a few more evolutions about the room, too busy to make a remark. But he quickly remembered Omega when he felt himself pressed downward until he was prone on the floor, pressing against the rough cement.

"Upstart!" grated the voice in his ear. "Don't get too cocky about all this. I'm still Jupiter around here."

"Okay, Jupe," gasped Mark. "You don't have to prove it. Ease up."

The pressure vanished and Mark bounded to his feet.

He waited for a minute and when no comment was forthcoming, he cautiously called Omega's name. No answer; Omega had gone about his mysterious business. Mark shook his head in bafflement. Omega liked to linger and talk and sometimes he seemed to be in a burning rush. And this was evidently one of those times. Though why Omega should be in a hurry, with all eternity before him, Mark couldn't imagine. . . .

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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Kincaid left him locked there, helpless against the crabs

Forgotten Island

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

Author of "Lost Harbors," "Death Due North," etc.

A coconut husk or the arm of a man—they are one to the robber crab

THERE were a good many things about robber crabs I wanted to check up on.

"You've come to the right place, doc," my skipper grinned. We were nosing into the lagoon at Judd's Island. "Jason Judd ain't no scientist like you be, doc. He'll do to stand a watch with, though, if you aim to log one of them robber crabs."

This was a small island at the tip of the Tongas. The land, dark green and no higher than its tallest palm, seemed to extend barely a mile in either direction. "Judd has a leasehold on all of it, hasn't he?" I asked.

The skipper nodded.

"Judd's only been here five year," he added. "Afore that, the palm crabs had it all to themselves."

We dropped anchor, not for cargo but merely to make a repair on the engine. This, the skipper said, would take till sundown. So I had one of his Kanakas row me ashore.

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Multiple-kneed banyans grew at the water's edge, boughs dripping to the sand, with here and there a long, curved coco-palm bending seaward. A ribbon of bare beach separated this fringe from the main wall of bush. There'd been a native settlement here, I'd heard, some fifty years ago. But a hurricane had driven its people over to the main Tongan chain, about eighty miles to leeward. Since then and until the recent occupation by Jason Judd, the natives had come over only once a year, in longboats, to harvest coconuts.

A shell path took me into the bush, through tangles of banana and breadfruit and wild taro, always with the tall coco-palms towering above every other growth. I heard a coconut fall and it made me think again of the robber crabs.

Reputedly this island was peculiarly infested with those monster crustaceans; climbing crabs with pincers like razor-sharp hedge shears.

The path led me a winding furlong. Then the bush opened to a clearing. At the deep end of it lay Judd's bungalow and drying sheds; white and baking in the sun. A Tongan boy was driving a coconut-laden donkey toward the sheds. An enormous brown woman with a basket of papayas balanced on her head, turned to stare at me. Then, with an odd stateliness, she passed through a gate into the compound.

I followed and came to the bungalow *lanai*. A middle-aged white man in slippers and singlet was seated there. At sight of me his ruddy face broadened to a smile. The eagerness of that smile suggested that Jason Judd seldom received visitors of his own race.

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But Judd barely noticed it. "Make yourself at home, my friend," he beamed, and clapped his hands. His house boy appeared with a tray of drinks.

I liked Judd at once. He was a big, mild man with blue eyes and a shock of sandy hair. Only an island planter could have been so cordial.

As soon as we were comfortable, I asked him about robber crabs. "Is it true, Mr. Judd, that they climb palms for the fruit? The Encyclopedia Britannica says they do; other authorities say they don't. Which is right?"

"They do," said Jason Judd.

"What about their size and power? I'm told a big one'll weigh twenty pounds and measure a foot across. Darwin said that one of them was once locked in a tin strong-box, and that the crab cut its way out through the metal."

"Darwin," said Judd, "was right."

"Any chance of my seeing one around here?"

He answered by calling the house boy. A direction in Tongan to the boy brought a huge, bare-chested native with a twenty gallon metal cask on his shoulder. He set the cask down in front of me and removed the lid. I looked in and saw a specimen of the *Birgus latro*, better known as the coconut or robber crab.

"Some of my boys happened to catch this one this morning," Judd explained.

The creature fascinated me. But I was glad it was inside that iron cask. Easily it would weigh twenty pounds and measure a foot across. Its fierce, uplifted pincers might have crushed a man's arm.

When the thing tried to climb out I took a nervous step back.

Jason Judd smiled. "To tell the truth," he admitted, "I've always been afraid of 'em myself. Soso here isn't, though. Pick it up, Soso."

The giant Tongan leaned forward over the cask. Suddenly his hands shot down and caught firm grips on the crab near the back of the shell. Holding tightly as he lifted the crab up and out, he extended it at arm's length toward me.

Again I stepped back. Quickly. The monster was wriggling furiously with all ten of its legs, the deadly pincers snapping backward at awkward angles to make contact with Soso's wrists.

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. takes nerve," Judd smiled. "Only a native can do that."

"It's like holding a rattlesnake by the neck," I said. "It's been done, but I wouldn't want to try it myself."

"Nor I," Judd agreed. He picked up a Malacca cane and teased the crab with it. I saw one of those great, flailing pincers clamp on the cane and crunch through it. The end foot of the cane, cleanly severed, fell to the floor.

The savagery of it made me shiver.

"Kill the brute and dress it, Soso," Judd directed. "We'll have crab meat for tiffin."

Soso went into the compound with the crab.

Jason Judd stoked his pipe and I brought out one of my own. "Have you always been a planter?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Until I came here five years ago, I was commander of the constabulary over at Aiupu."

It didn't strike me as strange that he'd been a policeman. Any British colonial of the venturesome stripe, like Judd, is likely to have worn a uniform at one time or another.

"How," I inquired, "did you happen to change over?"

"Why did I give up policing?" he murmured. "A robber crab had something to do with it, my friend."

He looked down at his two sunburned wrists and for the first time I noticed circular scars there. I wondered if a crab had made those scars.

It took a session of urging before he consented. I think now that he was lonely and was afraid I'd go back to my ship. He wanted to hold me as long as possible, and he did.

"JUST five years ago," Jason Judd told me, "there was a killing over at Vaipopo, on the main island chain. Chap named Kincaid shot a trader there and robbed him of a bag o' pearls. I set out from Aiupu, in a motor boat, to bring Kincaid in."

"Alone?" I asked.

"I started with a native constable, but he took sick and I had to drop him at Anu. The case was urgent, so I went on alone. He was a mean customer, Kincaid. Likely to resist arrest, if I didn't handle it right. I changed into my uniform blouse and Sam Browne just before putting in at Vaipopo. The king's uniform always impresses natives, you know, and I thought I might need to deputize a few of them to help me handle Kincaid.

"But I managed it without help. Got the handcuffs on him before he knew it. Searching his shack, I found the stolen pearls. There'd been an eyewitness to the murder and my orders were to take that witness also back to Aiupu. Otherwise Kincaid couldn't be convicted, since by his own story he'd acquired the pearls in fair trade."

Judd stopped to refill his pipe. "You located the witness?" I prompted.

He gave me a queer smile. "Aye, and was a bit bowled over to find the witness to be an eighteen-year-old Tongan girl. I thought she'd object to a ninety-mile ride in a motor boat, with a policeman and a murderer. But she didn't. In fact she was rather keen to go along. She'd once attended a convent school at Aiupu, and liked the prospect of visiting again with the nuns there. We could make the run in ten hours, I assured her."

"And did you?"

"Three hours out," Judd said, "we hit a nasty headwind. It cut me down to four knots and I began to worry about petrol. Then the motor went dead on me. I had to sweat over it for hours, and that headwind beating us off course. Kincaid, all this while, was shackled to a thwart forward. Laola, the Tongan girl, was cheerful about it. She sat aft by me, singing and strumming a guitar."

"I can imagine less pleasant company," I suggested, "if she was as pretty as young Tongans usually are."

Judd did not resume immediately. He sat in abstraction gazing out into the compound where Soso, in the shade of a ginger bush, was dismembering the robber crab for tiffin. Then my host turned to me with

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"Darwin," said Judd, "was right."

"Any chance of my seeing one around here?"

He answered by calling the house boy. A direction in Tongan to the boy brought a huge, bare-chested native with a twenty gallon metal cask on his shoulder. He set the cask down in front of me and removed the lid. I looked in and saw a specimen of the *Birgus latro,* better known as the coconut or robber crab.

"Some of my boys happened to catch this one this morning," Judd explained.

The creature fascinated me. But I was glad it was inside that iron cask. Easily it would weigh twenty pounds and measure a foot across. Its fierce, uplifted pincers might have crushed a man's arm.

When the thing tried to climb out I took a nervous step back.

Jason Judd smiled. "To tell the truth," he admitted, "I've always been afraid of 'em myself. Soso here isn't, though. Pick it up, Soso."

The giant Tongan leaned forward over the cask. Suddenly his hands shot down and caught firm grips on the crab near the back of the shell. Holding tightly as he lifted the crab up and out, he extended it at arm's length toward me.

Again I stepped back. Quickly. The monster was wriggling furiously with all ten of its legs, the deadly pincers snapping backward at awkward angles to make contact with Soso's wrists.

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earnest conviction. "I don't suppose they'd ever held a beauty contest in these islands. But if they had, Laolo would have won hands down."

"You got that motor fixed?" I asked.

"I managed to get it hitting about sundown, but only on three cylinders. By then the wind had shifted. We had a cross wind from there on. Headway was stubborn, so I got Laolo to help me hoist a sail. She was a smart sailor. I gave her the tiller and went forward for a look at Kincaid. He was sweating and swearing there, 'cuffed to a thwart. A wave swiped him and he whined, 'We'll founder and I'll drown like a rat!'

" 'That's what you are,' I said, and gave him a green coconut to suck. Then we shipped another wave and I had to start bailing.

"Dark came on with the wind fighting us. I had to steer by compass, without a star in sight, and not knowing how far we'd been beaten off course. Kincaid kept bawling to put back toward Vaipopo. Later, when the wind ripped our sail off, I wished I'd taken his advice. That was a mean night, my friend. Motor boats aren't made for seas like that. Half the time I was bailing, half the time I was trying to coax the engine to hit on four.

"Instead, it was soon hitting on only two. The petrol was three-fourths gone. By midnight I knew we'd never make either Vaipopo or Aiupu. The wind was a gale and keeling us to the gunwale. I tried to check bearings by dead reckoning. 'We can't be very far,' I said to Laolo, 'from the Island of Crabs.'

"She knew the place. Her people, she told me, went over once a year to harvest coconuts there. At all other times the island was deserted. 'I think I hear breakers,' she said.

"I couldn't bail fast enough and the boat was soon knee deep. That we'd capsize became certain. So I stumbled forward to take those handcuffs off Kincaid. No help for it, you see. Manacled, he wouldn't have a chance to make land. 'Get busy and bail,' I said to him. Then we heard breakers again and Kincaid yelled, 'Let's swim fer it.' 'You'll stay with the boat till she goes under,' I said.

"Then I remembered I had his loot—a thousand pounds worth of pearls. I'm not a good swimmer. But Laolo, an island girl, would be like a fish in any sea. Her chance to make the reef would be ten times mine; so I gave her the pearls. They were in a chamois-skin bag with a thong loop. I hooked the loop about her neck. 'If you're the only one gets out of this, Laolo, deliver 'em to the police at Aiupu.'

"Laolo promised. She said she was sure she could make the reef.

"I went into the cabin and brought out three lifebelts. But Laolo wouldn't take one. It would only encumber her, she said. While we were arguing about this, Kincaid made a snatch for my gun. I batted him down with it. Then I put the gun in one pocket and the handcuffs in another. I'd need them to handle Kincaid, in case we both got ashore.

"When the boat finally capsized, pitching us into dark rollers, it was every man for himself. The lifebelt buoyed me to the surface. I shouted but no one answered. I couldn't be sure if Kincaid had gotten his belt on, and I didn't much care. He was due for a hanging, anyway. As for Laolo, the chances were fair that she'd make the reef.

"The rollers carried me toward it, and I could hear them smashing there. I don't know how long the sea tossed me around. Hours, I think. In the end my leg jarred against coral. A wave banged me out and plastered me on a barely submerged reef; another one sucked me off again. A dozen times I was tossed up, half stunned, until finally my hands found a grip on coral. I clung until daylight came peeping over the sea."

THE *lanai* screen swung open and Soso appeared with a bowl of crab meat. "Very good to eat," he grinned, and passed on into the house.

Jason Judd handed me a palm leaf fan. The heat was stifling but I'd been too ab-

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sorbed to notice. "And the others?" I inquired. "Did they survive too?"

"When I made the main beach," he said, "I couldn't see anyone. Nor any tracks in the sand. First thing I did was wipe my gun dry with moss. The bullets were supposed to be water-proof. I put them in the sun to dry. A click was all I got, though, first time I snapped the trigger. But the next shell was good. I fired it into the air, hoping that Laolo, if she were ashore anywhere, would hear it and come.

"There was no response. I didn't think she'd drowned, though. It's pretty hard to drown a Tongan. But I worried on account of Kincaid. If he'd been beached, it meant that he was on the loose with full knowledge that Laolo had pearls in a bag around her neck. He'd be hot after them, I knew. Not only that, but the girl was a witness who could convict him of murder. He could save himself by doing away with her. That sent me racing down the beach, looking for Kincaid. I had to get those handcuffs back on him before he could find Laolo."

"And did you?" I asked.

"I did not," Judd admitted. "I found his tracks, though. Fresh bootprints on the beach. They were bound to be Kincaid's, because no one lived on the island then. The tracks led me into the bush. I followed hotfoot. It was a jungle of palms and taro, just like it is now. Broken fronds and reeds where he'd crashed through made it fairly easy to keep on his trail.

"The trail led me inland, nearly to mid-island. Then a sound in the bush, close by, made me stop. It was a crackling, crunching sound. I peered into a thicket and saw a big robber crab there; it was stripping the hull from a coconut. An ugly customer. I'd seen 'em before, but this one made me remember the island's name. The Island of Crabs. It was easy to imagine hundreds of those scissor-clawed devils crawling through the bush.

"I drew back from this one and chased on after Kincaid. And chased myself into an ambush. Kincaid must have heard me coming. He waylaid me with a pandanus club before I saw him. The club crashed on my head and laid me out cold. After a while, when I came out of it, Kincaid had my gun and the handcuffs were on my wrists.

"He was standing there, swearing at me. 'Where the blasted 'ell's that girl?' I knew he was thinking of the pearls."

Judd's pipe had gone out. I held my lighter toward him and asked, "Why didn't he kill you on the spot?"

"I expected him to," Judd said. "But my wits came back in time to give him a reason not to. I said: 'She's on the beach. I left her to take after you.'

" 'She still got the pearls?' he barked.

" 'No,' I said. 'She gave them to me and I hid 'em under a rock.' I could see that he only half believed me. 'Wot did yer 'ide 'em for?' he demanded.

" 'To make sure you wouldn't slip up and take 'em off of me,' I told him, 'some night when I'm sleeping. We're likely to be marooned here a month or so, you know.'

"He cocked the gun and aimed at my head. 'Wot rock did yer 'ide 'em under?'

" 'I'm not telling you,' I said. It made him furious, but he didn't shoot. If I'd told the truth, and he killed me, the pearls would be lost forever. His only chance was for me to lead him to them.

" 'Yer a blarsted liar!' he yelled. 'Yer 'aven't seen that girl.'

"But there was only one way he could prove it. He could find Laolo himself; if the pearls were still in her possession, he would know I was lying. He was sharp enough to understand this, and it saved my life. He had to keep me alive until he was sure.

"With the gun at my ribs he unlinked the handcuff from my left wrist. Then he made me kneel with my body against a cocopalm. I was still groggy; with that gun on me I couldn't resist. The man then stretched my arms around the palm bole and resnapped the cuff on my left wrist. It left me hugging the palm with my hands manacled on the far side of it."

Jason Judd now picked up the stub of a Malacca cane and pointed. "It was that

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palm out there in the clearing," he told me.

I looked out and saw the single tall palm amidst stumps. In clearing for a plantation here, some quirk of sentiment had evidently made Judd spare that mast to which he had once been chained by Kincaid.

"Kincaid left you, I suppose, to hunt for Laolo?"

"Aye," Judd said, "and I began shouting for her myself. I didn't know for sure, of course, if she'd ever reached the land. I almost hoped she hadn't. Certainly she'd be murdered if Kincaid got a hand on her. He had the gun. It didn't seem possible she could elude him for long, on an island barely a mile either way. I wanted to warn her he was on the loose, prowling for her life and the pearls. So I shouted myself hoarse.

"But she didn't hear me, deep in the bush there. I was kneeling against that tree, trying to break those cuffs. The strand of steel between them was only a quarter-inch in diameter, but you can't break a link like that by pulling on it. Nothing short of a hack saw, held by a friend on the other side of the tree, would do me any good."

JUDD looked ruefully at circular scars which still ringed his wrists. They told me of the torture he must have undergone there, writhing to break his bonds. And the torment of his mind as he waited to hear a shot spelling death for Laolo.

"Did Kincaid find her?" I asked.

"He did," Judd said. "I didn't know then, of course. But I know now. He found prints of small bare feet on the beach. Laolo's. The tracks didn't enter the bush, but led east down the sandy shore. The girl had started to circle the island looking for me.

"Kincaid followed her tracks. They stopped at the base of a beach palm. Kincaid looked up, saw nothing. The fronds were thick up there. But since the tracks didn't go beyond the tree, he knew she must have climbed it. She might have climbed it for the milk of a green coconut, as any famished Polynesian will, or she might have climbed to reach a high perch of lookout.

"So Kincaid shouted: 'I know you're there, girlie. Toss down them pearls.'

"No answer came from the tree. But Kincaid circled and kept peering up, and finally he saw a bare leg and an arm. Laolo was trying to hide herself in the fronds. We can imagine how frightened she was, with that brute down there yelling and waving a gun."

"What did she do?" I asked.

"She did just what any other islander would do," Judd said. "She broke off a coconut and threw it hard down at Kincaid's head. It took him by surprise. Hull and all, that nut must have weighed seven pounds. It stunned him for a minute, long enough for Laolo to slide down and scoot off into the bush."

"Smart girl!" I said.

"Kincaid," Judd resumed, "got up and went charging into the bush after Laolo."

My host paused to refill his pipe.

"He must have put in hours beating the bush for Laolo. All the while I was plastered with my face against that palm tree, too hoarse to shout any longer, and with insects stinging my neck. Once I heard someone crash through the bush not far away, and I called Laolo's name. But there was no answer, so it must have been Kincaid.

"Then I heard another sound. It was a robber crab ripping the hull from a coconut in a nearby thicket. Toward mid-day I saw one of those crabs crawl up a leaning palm to the right of me. I saw it break off a coconut and heard the nut thud as it fell. The robber came sliding backwards down the palm then, and it made my flesh creep. What if one of those long-clawed devils should come climbing my own tree! It would have to crawl right over one of my arms . . ."

Judd's voice broke off with a choke, as though the horror of that long past ordeal still shocked him. His eyes kept fixed upon a palm standing amidst stumps in the clearing.

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WHEN he resumed, his voice came with husky tension. "All day I was there, hugging that palm, while Kincaid beat the bush for Laolo. My arms grew numb and thirst made a whisper of my voice, when I tried to shout. I saw no more of the crabs. But more than once I heard a coconut fall. There was no breath of wind, so always I presumed it was some palm crab robbing fruit from the fronds.

"At sundown Kincaid returned to me. He unlocked my handcuffs and knocked me prone with the gun. I was too weak and stiff to fight back. He stripped me of my uniform blouse, my Sam Browne belt and my cap which bore the insignia of an island inspector. The blouse was white, with brass buttons and red stripes on the sleeves. The badge of my office was pinned on it.

"Kincaid jerked me to my knees and handcuffed me once more with my arms hugging the palm tree. Then he put on my blouse, cap and Sam Brown belt. His sea-drenched pants were white and baggy, much like my own. To any native who did not know him by sight, he would now appear to be an officer of the Crown.

"With a grin, he went marching off into the dusk. My guess was that he realized he'd be marooned here a month or two until natives from the main Tongan chain came over to harvest coconuts. He could then claim to be myself and make them take him to wherever he wanted to go.. In the meantime there was no use of him settling with me until he could also eliminate Laolo. By leaving me manacled to the tree all night, he could crush my resistance and make me show him under which rock, if any, I had hidden the pearls.

"And there I was. Night came on, sultry, deadly; it seemed to me that a million mosquitos were stinging my flesh. They sucked my blood. Coatless, capless, unable to slap back at them, I kept kneeling there all those dark hours waiting for my own death—and a shot off in the bush somewhere that would mean Laolo's."

"Did the robber crabs visit you?" I asked.

"No, they're diurnal in habit," Judd said. "At night they hide away in deep holes. But I heard fruit bats whirring overhead and quarreling in a mango tree close by. Once I looked up and saw a pair of them, black and hideous, spreading their wings against the moon."

"You mean flying foxes, don't you?" I put in. "But what about Kincaid?"

"I expected him at daybreak," Judd said. "But I'd underrated his shrewdness. He'd taken my uniform not only to deceive natives a month later, but as an immediate trap for Laolo. When light came, the rascal took a position on the bare sand of the beach, close to the tide. He lay quiet there on his side, with his back to the bush. With his face pillowed on his arm, he would seem to be myself sleeping; or it might seem that I'd just been washed up by the sea.

"You can see the way he had figured it out, and the cunning of the man's method.

"He knew that Laolo would be hunting for me all this while. She'd be circling the island, peering from the bush, at times climbing palms to spy at long range down the shores. Kincaid was right, for soon after daybreak she saw his uniformed figure there.

" 'Captain,' she called in eager relief, and came running. I could protect her from Kincaid, she thought.

"Kincaid took precious care not to answer. His back was to her and he kept his face buried in his arms, like an exhausted sleeper. He could hear her footsteps as she advanced. 'Captain,' she called again, and reached down to shake him awake.

"That, of course, was the misstep he had been waiting for.

"He hopped up and caught her wrists. She struggled to get free, and he saw that a chamois-skin bag was still looped about her throat. His hands snatched at the bag, giving a jerk which broke the cord. It released Laolo and she ran frantically for the bush.

"It took perhaps five seconds for Kincaid to drop the bag and dig a gun from

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his blouse pocket. He fired just as Laolo dived into the thickets. From near mid-island I heard that shot and it seemed to burn through my own flesh. A dreadful picture of the brute chasing her, shooting to kill, made me begin shouting again.

"Laolo was running my way, and she heard me. Easily she could outrun Kincaid and so she arrived long before he did. Also, it's likely that he counted the pearls to make sure they were all there, before taking her trail.

"Laolo appeared by me, wide-eyed with terror. Thorns had ripped her *lava-lava* to shreds and burs from the bush clung to her long loose hair. Her bare arms and legs were scratched and bleeding. She was like a cave girl in flight from some devil with a club. 'Run, Laolo,' I begged. 'Hide yourself.'

"She stared at the handcuffs which kept me hugging the palm. When she darted away, I thought she was resuming flight. But in a minute she reappeared with a sharp clamshell in hand. With it she began sawing and rasping at the link between my wrists.

"Do you realize what desperation was in that effort?

"It was only a quarter-inch stem of steel, that link, and it allowed me to hold my hands about ten inches apart. But I knew she'd never rasp through it with a clamshell. A hack saw would do it, given time, but not a clamshell. 'It's no use, Laolo,' I gasped. 'Run. Hide yourself before he comes.' But she kept stubbornly at it. The mark she made on the steel was only a pitiful, futile scratch; but I couldn't make her leave me. Then we heard Kincaid coming. He was crashing through the bush our way. Having recovered the pearls now, he'd be sure to murder us outright. 'Drop that silly shell,' I begged again, 'and run.' But still she wouldn't."

A PALE sweat stood on Jason Judd's face as he told me this. The strain of his voice made it clear that he was living over again that frightful climax by the palm.

"When we heard a crunching sound in a thicket close by," Judd resumed, "I thought it was Kincaid closing in on us. But Laolo knew it wasn't. She knew it was a robber crab ripping the hull from a coconut. Dropping the clamshell, she ran into the thicket. Then she emerged and I was jolted to see that she was holding out straight in front of her, with firm, desperate grips on the back of its shell, a giant crab. Like the one you saw Soso holding a while ago, only this one was even bigger. Its writhing weight made Laolo stagger as she advanced toward my shackles. I sensed her plan then. The crab was squirming in fury. Its tough, monstrous pincers were reaching backward to get grips on her wrists. They would seize and crunch anything they touched. Almost anything, that is. A bone, a stick, a shell—but hardly a bar of tempered steel.

"'It's no use,' I protested; 'it can't bite steel.' But Laolo came desperately on with it. 'Spread your hands,' she gasped, 'far apart.' The link would only let me spread them ten inches. Laolo held the crab toward it, at an angle, so that a pincer could touch it. I felt the link quiver as the pincer clamped on it like a vise.

"I can feel it now . . .

"But still it was no use. Not even a robber crab could pich through that tough link. I peered around the palm and saw it clinging there, in fury to crush, and I saw the other pincer beating back, straining to grip finger or wrist of Laolo.

"All the while I could hear Kincaid coming on. He was near to us now. Then a sharp cry of pain came from Laolo. I craned my neck to peer again around the palm bole—and saw that the crab had managed to grip her right wrist. I saw blood spurt there. Then Laolo fell to the ground, fainting from sheer torture. The crab, choosing to grip flesh rather than steel, went with her.

"I think I almost fainted myself," Judd admitted now, and I could see the horror of it still mirrored in his eyes.

"Kincaid arrived then?" I prompted.

"Aye, he came charging like a bull from

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the bush. He had the gun in one hand, the pearl bag in the other. He saw that I was still manacled to the palm. Then he saw Laolo in a faint on the ground, with a robber crab backing away from her mangled wrist. It jolted him for a moment.

"But only for a moment. Then his mind bounced back to its purpose, which was double murder. He must make sure that no trace was ever found of us. Should he bury us in the bush here? Or should he drive us at gun's point to the beach, where he could hide us in the sea? I saw him debating this and it gave me one last minute of grace. I wrenched with the final desperate ounce of my strength at the link binding my hands; I twisted one wrist above the other; I clapped my hands, then snapped them apart with a jerk; I strained and writhed them until I thought my bones would crack.

"Instead, it was the link that cracked. It broke in the middle and I was free. I didn't know why, then. I know now. The pincer of that robber crab hadn't been able to crush through the steel, but it had made two tiny dents exactly opposite each other. You've tried that on a wire or stick, I'll wager. You can't break it when it's unscarred; but if you first make a couple of slight nicks opposite each other, any slender, brittle bar will snap easily in two."

"That's true," I conceded. "But you were still stiff and too weak to fight. Kincaid had a gun."

"But he didn't at once notice I was free," Judd said. "I kept kneeling there for a minute, clearing my wits, with my arms still hugging the tree. I knew I was too far gone to strike any hard blow. But I might throw my weight at him, perhaps knock him off balance. I weighed fifteen stone then, as now.

"When I staggered up and hurled that weight at Kincaid, it took him by surprise. He went down and I jumped with both boots on his face. Before he could get up I booted the gun from his hand. Then I jumped on his head again and didn't stop until I'd kicked him senseless."

"And Laolo?" I asked anxiously.

Judd winced. "It was pretty ghastly, my friend. She needed a deal of taking care of, for the month we were there. I don't feel quite up to telling you about that. Kincaid, though, gave me no trouble. I kept him trussed with lliana vines, hand and foot, until the long-boats came to harvest coconuts. Not long after that I got my prisoner to Aiupu. He was hanged at Suva."

ONE loose thread still bothered me. Why had Judd returned to become a planter here, on this island of bitter memories? As I wondered about this, Soso came padding out on the *lanai*. "Tiffin is ready, master," he announced.

Judd ushered me into the house. The front room had bright prints on three walls, while a fourth was lined snugly with books. There was a divan of deep cushions, and a reading lamp. Solid British comfort here. It might have been the den of an old country manor.

Then Judd led me on into the tiffin room. Here I found walls of bamboo and rugs of grass matting. The island touch. Brilliant blooms overflowed from a dozen vases. The tiffin table, covered with tapa cloth, had in its center a huge bowl of crab salad. There were bowls of fruit and a basket of scones.

At one end of the table was a silver tea service, with cups for three. A hostess of great charm presided there. She stood up graciously as I came in. Her modish and strictly European tea gown confused me for a moment; and then I saw that she was pure Tongan.

"I want you to meet my wife," Judd said.

In his voice I caught pride, devotion, loyalty—and something more. Something rich and deep and humble was there, as though the man spoke of one whose sacrifice he could never repay.

Mrs. Jason Judd gave me a shy smile. She began pouring tea, then, with her left hand. The right, I could see, had been cut off cleanly at the wrist.

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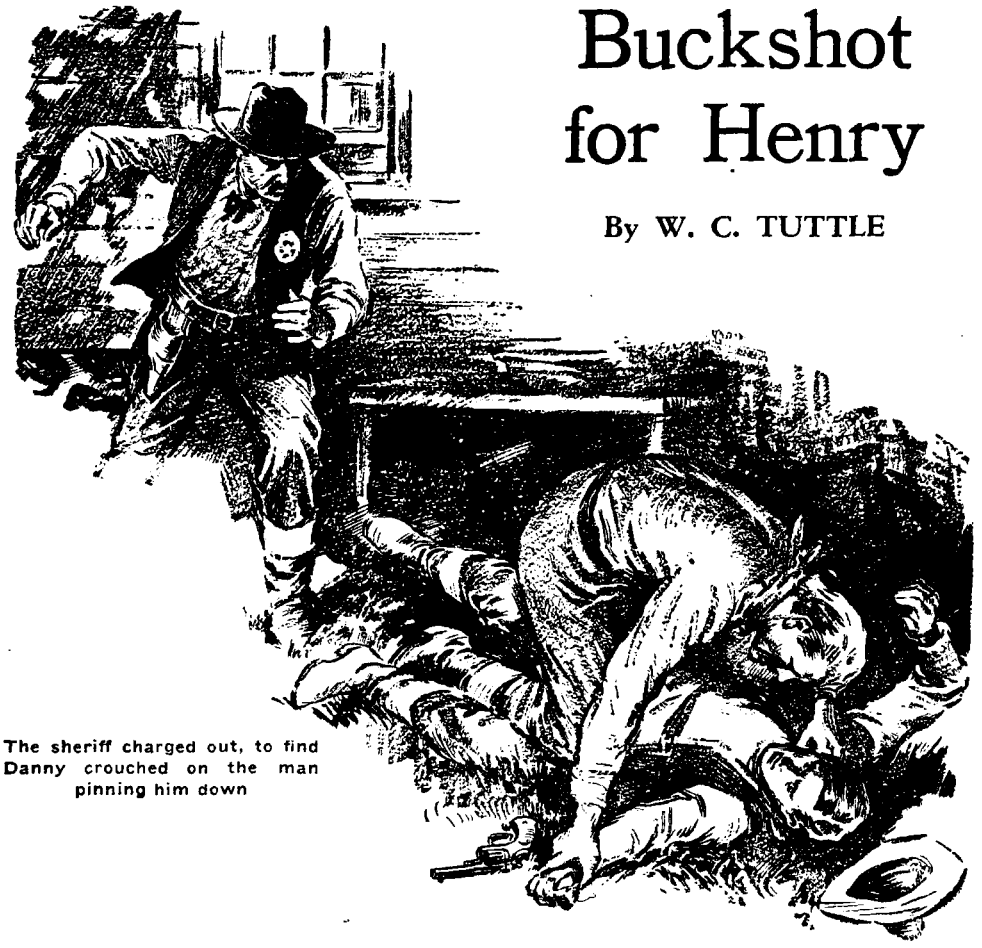
Buckshot for Henry

By W. C. TUTTLE



The sheriff charged out, to find Danny crouched on the man pinning him down

Start now this exciting novel of high-jinks and skulduggery in Tonto town

IN A lonely cabin a posse found a dead man dressed in prison clothes, his face mangled by a shotgun blast. This, the men told each other, was the body of TIGER SMITH, the escaped convict who had been sentenced for attempting to murder his wife. But they did not know that a few moments before their arrival Tiger Smith had crept away from the cabin, dressed in the clothes of the nameless man whom he had killed. . . .

The Shame of Arizona has been erased. Out on the JHC ranch HENRY HARRISON CONROY devotes himself to cattle raising and prune whisky, for he has been deposed as sheriff of Tonto town. With him, of course, are JUDGE VAN TREECE, OSCAR THE VIKING, FRIJOLE, and those amiable maniacs, THUNDER and LIGHTNING MENDOZA; and also there is DANNY REGAN, perhaps the only competent cattleman among them. Right now the JHC is faced with disaster: KING FISHER, rancher, mine owner and the new political boss of TONTO, has announced that he will undersell every cattleman in the Valley.

IT IS Danny Regan who first discovers the stranger in Tonto, one ALBERT MARSHALL HENSHAW. Albert is on the trail of his vanished uncle who had discovered a gold mine in Wild Horse Valley; and Albert carries with him a map describing the location of the mine. Then when Lightning Mendoza discovers what he calls a "mommy"—the withered body of a white man, dead for several years—it is suspected

This story began in last week's Argosy

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that this may be the missing prospector Henshaw. Henry Conroy begins some quiet investigations, discovering that King Fisher seems to know more about Henshaw than he will admit.

Then tragedy strikes Tonto town. VINEGAR BILL HAWKINS, Conroy's successor in the sheriff's office, has recently married a widow who has an attractive young daughter, particularly admired by Danny Regan and by an individual called Spook, the sheriff's assistant. One night a blast of buckshot is fired into the sheriff's home, and Bill Hawkins' wife is killed. That same evening the Mendoza brothers, instructed to bring Albert Henshaw to the JHC ranch, find the young man trussed up in his hotel bedroom. Later, while he is telling Henry Conroy that his mysterious, masked assailant warned him to get out of Wild Horse Valley, Albert Henshaw finds that the map locating his uncle's mine has been stolen.

Meanwhile, some private worry has put King Fisher in a vile temper. When his son ROY, a worthless, heavy-drinking boy, demands money to pay gambling debts, Fisher refuses him flatly. Roy walks out on his father in a savage humor, muttering that he knows enough to cause King Fisher plenty of trouble. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE FRIENDLY DICE

HENRY and Judge went to Tonto City that morning. The tragedy had sobered the town, and men spoke quietly on the streets. They found Spook at the sheriff's office, and for once his sense of humor had faded.

"Bill's down at the house," he told them, "and he won't see anybody. He shore took it hard, gents. Jest sets there."

"Any clues?" asked Henry.

"Only a busted window and buckshot in the walls. I—I tried to tell Bill that the load was meant for him, but he won't have it. Bill was at one end of the table, Joan was at the other end, and Mrs. Hawkins was in the middle. Her back wasn't over ten, twelve feet from the muzzle of that shotgun. They're havin' the inquest tomorrow."

"Rather a puzzling case," said Henry. "Did I understand rightly when I heard that she came from Denver, Spook?"

"That's right, Henry. Lived in Denver quite a number of years."

Henry looked thoughtfully at Judge. "Have we ever known anyone from Denver, Judge?" he asked.

Judge shook his head slowly. "Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Her daughter might know if she had a bitter enemy," said Henry.

"She says no," replied Spook. "She says her mother didn't have no enemies."

"Well," said Henry dryly, "a load of buckshot in the back isn't exactly a friendly gesture. At least, I would not designate it as a mark of great friendship."

"*It is a terrible thing,*" *sighed Judge.* "No one should rest until that murderer is apprehended. If I were Bill Hawkins, I would hire the best detective—"

"That's jist what I told him," interrupted Spook. "But he's too upset to do anythin'."

Henry and Judge sauntered up to the bank, where they talked about the murder with Harvey Olds, the banker. When the conversation lagged, Henry said:

"Mr. Olds, I have two hundred head of beef, ready for market, and I need some money. Would they be security for about five thousand dollars?"

The banker shook his head, his lips pursed. "Sorry, Conroy, but I am unable to make such a loan."

"Of course," said Henry, "you would be in a position to know that King Fisher coerced the buyers into refusing my cattle."

"Well, yes, I did hear something about it. Your assets, as you might say, are frozen, Conroy."

"Frozen—very true. And frozen by the man who owns control of this bank. Of course, I can make a deal with some other packing outfit, but I need ready cash."

"Mr. Conroy, I am not interested in the methods used by Mr. Fisher. My job is to operate this bank—under orders from my board."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Henry courteously.

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"Why not take the matter up with Mr. Fisher personally?"

Henry blinked and caressed his red nose. "Mr. Olds," he said quietly, "can it be possible that you are suddenly developing a sense of humor?"

"No, no, it was merely an idea."

"And a very good one," said Henry soberly. "Shall we go, Judge? Good-day to you, Mr. Olds. It has been nice seeing you, sir."

They left the bank and crossed the street to the King's Castle. Business was rather slack at that time of day, but there was the usual crowd of loafers, miners off shift, cowboys and saloon girls. One poker game was in progress, surrounded by the usual crowd of onlookers.

There were many smiles as Henry and Judge approached the long bar. Drinking, with them, was a ritual. Dignified, courteous and quiet, they drank to each other. Judge always said, "A very good health to you, my friend," and Henry would reply, "And to you, sir; a gentleman and a scholar."

ROY FISHER was in the poker game, evidently losing. When his father came in from his private office, Roy left the game for the bar, where he swallowed two full-sized drinks of whisky, scowled at Henry and Judge, and left the saloon. It was not unusual for King Fisher to sit in a game in place of his regular dealer. He spoke to the dealer, warning him not to give Roy any more credit, and then took the dealer's seat.

King Fisher saw Judge and Henry at the bar, and a smile flashed across his thin-lipped mouth, as he said:

"An empty chair, Conroy."

Henry turned and looked at King Fisher for several moments, while every eye was upon Henry.

"I rarely play penny-ante," said Henry.

King Fisher flushed when someone had the temerity to laugh.

"You can make your own limit," said King Fisher.

Henry came over and sat down in the vacant chair, resting his chubby hands on the table-top, his cane between his knees.

"Mr. Fisher," he said calmly, "you persuaded a cattle buyer to not buy anything except your cattle. You undersold every rancher in Wild Horse Valley, in order to try and freeze us out. I have two hundred head of beef ready to ship. What are they worth as a gambling stake?"

King Fisher's color flared again, but he remained silent for several moments. Then he said:

"About five thousand dollars, Conroy."

"I would estimate that they are worth twelve thousand," said Henry calmly. "But, as I say, I never play penny-ante."

"You—" King Fisher hesitated. "You want to play for five thousand?"

"Of course," Henry nodded.

"All right," said King Fisher slowly. "What do we play?"

Henry smiled slowly. "To prevent skullduggery," he said, "we will roll one die —once—for five thousand dollars."

King Fisher scowled thoughtfully. "One die—one roll, Conroy?"

"If you have that much nerve, Fisher —yes."

The audience gasped and moved in closer. One of the gamblers took the dice from the crap table and tossed them over in front of King Fisher. Henry looked at them and shook his head.

"Not those," he said.

"What's the matter with them?" demanded Fisher.

"That," replied Henry, "would require the opinion of the man who made them. It is very difficult for a layman to find anything wrong, before or after his money is gone. I really prefer ordinary dice, such as are used at the bar."

King Fisher got to his feet and went over to the bar where the alert bartender, masked from the audience by King Fisher's broad back, gave Fisher two of the ordinary-looking transparent dice. A whispered word, and King Fisher came back to the table, palming the extra die.

"Who gets the first roll?" he asked.

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"Do you want us to cut for it, Conroy?"

"We will roll that die, sixes high, aces low—and I shall waive the right to draw for first roll, Mr. Fisher. You may shoot when ready."

"Sixes high, aces low," said Fisher.

With a twist of his wrist he spun the die out on the green-covered table. Every eye in the place was on that die, which showed a five. A sudden mutter went up from the crowd. Fisher picked up the die, laughed huskily and handed it to Henry.

"Try and beat that one, Conroy," he said. "The odds are against you, my friend, and I believe I own the cattle."

Henry, his eyes narrowed, a half-smile in his lips, shook the die in his left hand. Then he cast it out on the table, and a roar went up from the crowd.

"A six!"

KING FISHER leaned back in his chair, staring at that die. The bartender, who had left his post to watch the match, went back, licking his lips, a puzzled expression in his eyes. Henry sighed and lighted a cigar.

"I will thank you for the cash, Mr. Fisher," he said.

King Fisher paid, his face stony. Henry folded the great wad of bills, thanked King Fisher very gravely, and walked out with Judge, whose face was gradually resuming its normal color.

They went to the bank, where Banker Olds looked with amazement at the pile of bills which Henry had placed on the slab in front of the teller's window, along with his almost depleted bankbook.

"You—you must have taken my suggestion, Mr. Conroy," he said.

"Yes, thank you very much," said Henry pleasantly. "I did see him in person."

As the teller made out the deposit, Henry took a transparent die from his pocket and rolled it along the ledge. Three times he sent it rolling, and each time it came up—a deuce. Judge watched him, puzzled over it all. Finally Henry threw it into a wastebasket.

Over at the King's Castle, in King Fisher's private office, Fisher and his head bartender leaned over the desk and carefully rolled a transparent die. Time after time they rolled it, and time after time it showed a six.

"Damn him!" muttered King Fisher. "He's a crook! He shifted dice on me. That's why he wanted those bar dice. But what became of our dice?"

"Maybe," said the bartender, "when you rolled a five, he suspected that the companion die would roll a deuce—so he used his six-dice."

"The dirty crook! Well, forget it. I'll get even for that one."

While Henry and Judge were driving back to the ranch, Judge said:

"I died a dozen times between Fisher's roll and yours, Henry. You had a five to beat. Gad, man, you have nerve! And just to think that in the all those rolls in the bank you did not do better than a deuce."

"Quaint, wasn't it?" Henry smiled. "One never knows one's luck, does one?"

After a few moments of reflection Judge said:

"That five thousand dollars saved our life, Henry. It was a great triumph, indeed. It was a case of your luck against the luck of King Fisher—and you won."

"I am not exactly proud," sighed Henry, "but I am grateful, Judge."

They were nearly back to the ranch, when Henry said:

"I forgot what we went to get at Tonto, Judge. We need flour and potatoes."

"Send Frijole in after them this evening," suggested Judge.

"In case he is sober enough to drive," agreed Henry. "Danny may want to go in, too."

But there was nobody at home when they arrived. Danny had left a note on the table, saying that he and Oscar had gone to repair a windmill at Jonah Wells, while Frijole, Albert and Thunder and Lightning had gone to haul poles to repair the corral fence.

Henry and Judge secured Frijole Bill's supply of prune whisky, took easy chairs on the front porch, and spent the rest of

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the day in complete relaxation. It was nearly dark when they realized that Frijole was not getting supper.

"Unreliable, diminutive creature," said Judge. "Traitor to the stomachs of men. Malefactor—"

"Something must have happened to them," decided Henry. "They should have been back long ago. I suggest that we go and search for them."

"A stimulating suggestion," Judge agreed. "This is no time for inaction. Let us go at once."

Rather than hitch up the team or saddle horses, they started walking down an old road, and about a mile from the ranch they met the four men who had gone to haul poles. They were walking and driving the team.

"Firs'," explained Lightning, "we break theese haxle from the wagon. Eet ees the front haxel, which ees behin'. Then we get heem feexed pretty damn bad, and then the tire lose the wheel. So we walk home and push the horse."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "But why didn't some of you ride the horses?"

"Albert he ees trying," said Thunder. "Theese pintado throw heem into brosh-pile. We ask heem if he likes for trying more, but he ees more rady for walking t'ree, four mile."

"That spotted horse lost his temper," said Albert wearily.

"Me, too," declared Frijole Bill, a little, thin-faced rawhider of sixty summers, whose mustache was far too big for a face so small.

"What irked you?" asked Judge, standing on one foot to ease his corns.

"Tryin' to keep the rollin'-stock together," replied Frijole. "If we ever run out of bailin'-wire, this whole spread will fall apart."

They walked back to the ranch in the semi-darkness. Frijole hurried to the kitchen door, anxious to get a belated supper. Danny and Oscar were at the stable, unsaddling their horses, when Frijole yelled at the top of his voice:

"What's been goin' on around here?"

CHAPTER VII

WHO'S DEAD?

FRIJOLE was standing near the kitchen door, looking at a dark object on the ground. The rest of them hurried up there.

"King Fisher's kid!" called Frijole. "Looks plenty dead t' me."

The young man was flat on his back, dirty, bloody and motionless. Henry discovered that Roy was not dead, and turned to Danny.

"Get a blanket off a bed, Danny; we will take him into the house. Frijole, you bring a lamp."

"Madre de Dios!" gasped Lightning. "The law ees among us."

Henry looked up quickly. Vinegar Bill Hawkins and Spook Gilliam, the deputy, had just dismounted from their horses and were coming over to them. Frijole came out with the lamp, but nearly dropped it when he saw the officers.

"Roy Fisher!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"We found him—just now," replied Henry, realizing that his explanation sounded very weak.

The sheriff made a quick examination and turned to Spook.

"Get Doc Knowles—quick, Spook."

Spook ran to his horse and a moment later he was galloping toward Tonto. The sheriff straightened up and helped them slide a blanket under the unconscious young man and take him into the house. They placed him carefully on a cot. Then the sheriff said:

"Conroy, I need more explanation than you gave me."

"I really do not know any more about it, Hawkins."

"Well, some of yuh do!" snapped the sheriff. "Out with it!"

No one offered any explanation, so the sheriff said:

"We all know that there's bad blood between yore outfit and King Fisher. No jury in the world—"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Why speak of a jury?"

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"I'm no fool," said the sheriff coldly. "There's eight of yuh here. Some of yuh know what happened. Go ahead and talk."

"None of us were here," replied Henry. "Judge and I were gone about a half-hour, looking for the boys with the load of poles. Danny and Oscar had been working on a windmill over at Jonah Wells, and we all got here at the same time, which was a few minutes ago."

"You was gone about a half-hour, eh?"

"Was or were," said Henry, "I suppose either is permissible."

"And Roy wasn't here, when you left, eh?"

"No, I do not believe he was, Sheriff."

The sheriff nodded grimly and looked at the wounded man.

"King Fisher will raise hell about this," he said.

"Well," said Danny, "Fisher can blame himself for this. He let the kid run wild, drink all he wanted, run gamblin' bills and all that. He gave him a fast horse and a six-gun, and wasn't particular what kind of women the kid associated with. It's a wonder he didn't run into the hot end of a bullet before this, Bill."

"Yeah, I know," sighed the sheriff. "Did Roy say why he came here?"

"No, yuh don't," said Danny. "He's just like he was when we found him; so yuh might as well bark up another tree. We didn't shoot him."

"I hope he lives to say who did shoot him."

"His holster is empty," remarked Frijole. The sheriff nodded.

"You heard about my game with Fisher, I presume," said Henry.

"Yeah, I did," replied the sheriff. "Fisher told me."

"I'm sorry," said Henry quickly. "Hawkins, I—I wanted you to know how we felt about what happened at your home. It was a terrible thing, and you have our deepest sympathy."

The sheriff's face hardened and seemed to turned gray in the lamplight. His shoulders slumped and he sat down on the edge of a chair.

"Thank yuh," he said huskily. "In the excitement, I—well, I kinda forgot my own troubles, Conroy."

"Yes, I know." Henry nodded. Frijole cleared his throat raspingly.

"I'll heat some water," he said. "Doc'll need a lot, I reckon."

IT SEEMED hours before Spook came back, bringing Doctor Knowles and King Fisher. The big rancher ignored everyone in his haste to take a look at his son. The doctor went right to work on the wound, while King Fisher, his jaw shut tightly, watched him work. The others stood back.

"Lost a lot of blood," informed the doctor, "Young, though—might pull through. More water, Frijole."

"We'll take him home right away," said King Fisher.

"Hurt badly," said the doctor. "Might not be well to move him."

"I'll take the chance!" answered Fisher. "You don't suppose I'd leave him here, do yuh?"

"Well, I don't know," said the doctor.

"You could use our light wagon," suggested Henry. "We could pile it full of hay and—"

"I'll furnish my own vehicle, if yuh don't mind!" snapped Fisher. "I'm not askin' anythin' of you and yore outfit, except—who shot my boy?"

"We have told our story to the sheriff, Mr. Fisher," replied Henry. "It is no secret that we do not like you, nor do we like the way you do business, but we did not harm your son."

"And," added Danny, "if we wanted to do some shootin', we'd take a crack at you—not yore kid."

"We'll find out about this," snarled King Fisher. "Conroy, you or one of your outfit did this; so I am asking that the sheriff arrest you for attempted murder."

"Wait a minute, King," said the sheriff. "You haven't any evidence."

"I'll get evidence. Haven't I any rights in this matter?"

"You better talk with John Campbell,

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the prosecutor," counseled the sheriff.

"And in the meantime, the killer rides away free, eh?"

"Ain't nobody ridin' away," said Danny. "We may not like the smell of a polecat, but we don't run away from 'em, Fisher."

"Why, you damn—" Fisher started toward Danny, but the sheriff blocked him neatly.

"Cool off," he advised. "Danny is eggin' you into throwin' a punch or reachin' for a gun."

Thudding hoofs stopped outside the front of the house. Before anyone could reach the door, Bob Haney, Fisher's foreman, came in.

"How's Roy?" he asked quickly.

"Hurt pretty badly," replied King Fisher. "We'll—"

"Wait a minute," said Haney. "They told me in town what happened. Two of the boys from Scorpion Bend were on their way to the Golden Streak, and they found Sig Foster near the forks of the road—dead. The buckboard and team were about a half-mile further on, tangled up in the brush. They told me at the mine to tell you that the bedroll was gone."

"Sig Foster dead and the bedroll gone," repeated King Fisher.

"What's the bedroll got to do with it?" asked the sheriff.

"Got to do with it?" said King Fisher harshly. "That bedroll had over a hundred pounds of raw gold inside it. Sig Foster was takin' it to Scorpion Bend. Twenty-five thousand dollars worth!"

"Sig Foster was a fine man," said the doctor.

"To hell with all that!" roared King Fisher. "We've got to find that gold!" He turned and looked at Danny. "Where was you this afternoon?"

"None of your damn business!" snapped Danny.

"Mr. Fisher," interrupted the doctor, "I believe we should plan to move this boy as quickly as possible. He has very little fever now."

King Fisher turned and ordered Bob Haney to ride to the ranch and bring a vehicle. Haney left at once. The sheriff said:

"King, I suppose I better ride to the mine and get what information I can on that robbery. Nothin' I can do here."

"And take King Fisher with yuh," advised Danny warningly.

"Some sense in that, too," admitted the sheriff. "C'mon, King."

"All right," Fisher nodded. "But I'm not through with this outfit. Just remember that, will yuh?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Fisher," replied Henry calmly. "We are not at all through with you; so we are pleased to know that it is not one-sided."

King Fisher stopped, but the sheriff urged him along, and the door closed behind them.

"I DIDN'T know that *anybody* talked like that to the great King Fisher," said the doctor, as he wiped his hands.

"Henry ees tell the devil to go home, right in your face," declared Lightning proudly.

"I was really afraid there might be a fight," said Albert.

"Was that why you picked up the poker?" asked Henry.

"I—I did not realize that I had been seen," replied Albert. "While I have had little experience in fighting, I might have been able to deal at least one telling blow."

"Good boy!" applauded Danny.

"How much of a chance has Roy?" queried Henry. The doctor smiled.

"Very good, if they do not bounce him too much on the way home. I really wanted to find out whether King Fisher cared a whoop about anybody—even his own son; so I made it worse than it is. But he was more concerned over the loss of the gold. And he was not interested in the killing of Sig Foster, who was a fine fellow, as honest as a dollar. I am just a bit afraid that King Fisher is self-centered."

"And as yellow as a Jim Hill mustard in full bloom," added Danny.

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"Damned if I don't believe I'll make some coffee," said Frijole.

"That is the most constructive thing I have heard today," said Henry. "And you might add some ham and eggs, too, Frijole. How about it, doctor?"

"And I shall remain eternally yours." The doctor smiled.

It was over an hour later, when Bob Haney and a couple of the men from the Diamond F came after the wounded man. They all helped to load him into the wagon, and the doctor went with them. Spook headed for Tonto, and everyone at the ranch sighed with relief.

"It has all been very exciting," said Albert.

"Sure," agreed Lightning quickly. "One man ees keeled, somebody ees stealing more gold than I am ever seeing, and some people are shooting Roy Feesher couple times or two. Theese countree ees toff like a basket from snakes, and that ees all, I hope and pray."

"After that," said Henry dryly, "we may all go to bed, feeling that everything has been fully covered."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAW LIKES WHISKY

THE inquests over the bodies of the sheriff's wife and Sig Foster brought no new developments. Everyone turned out for the funerals, which were held on the same day. King Fisher, still fuming over the loss of the twenty-five thousand dollars in raw gold, was there.

Roy had recovered consciousness, but did not accuse anyone of shooting him. He admitted that he had been too drunk to know what happened. Why he was at the JHC, he did not know.

Vinegar Bill Hawkins was like a man in a daze, sitting alone much of the time. He came out to see Henry and Judge, officially, and the three of them sat on the shaded porch. Hawkins seemed to want to talk about his wife; so they let him ramble on.

"Yuh know, it's a funny thing," he remarked. "Her first husband was a notorious criminal. His name was Pelkey. They lived down south, where she had a lot of city property. Right after they was married he argued her into sellin' a lot of it. I think she got about fifty thousand dollars in cash, and then Pelkey tried to murder her for the money. He got the money, but she recovered. Then he took the name of Tiger Smith.

"Well, he left a bloody trail for a while, before he got sent to the penitentiary. I was workin' on a farm for a feller who owned several bloodhounds, which he rented to the penitentiary at times. When Tiger Smith escaped, they called for the dogs, and I went along on the hunt. My brother, who wasn't such a good citizen, owned a shack deep in the swamp where Tiger Smith had gone, and I just had a hunch that he might be headin' for that spot.

"Well, we trailed him to where he took to the water, and then I told the boys about that shack, so we went there. We heard a shot before we reached the place, and we found a man dressed in convict stripes layin' in that cabin, his head and face shot away with a shotgun. He had pulled the trigger with his toe."

"You say," reminded Henry, "that you found a man, but you did not say it was Tiger Smith, Bill."

"No, I didn't, Henry," replied the sheriff quietly. "I didn't know Tiger Smith, but I had read a lot about his case."

"Then you didn't know whether it was Tiger Smith or not?"

"I knew it wasn't, Henry—it was my brother. I recognized a scar on the back of his right hand."

"You did not tell anyone?" queried Judge.

The sheriff shook his head. "No, I didn't, Judge. Maybe I wanted to get him myself. Anyway, I went to see Mrs. Pelkey, who was a young woman. I wanted a decription and a picture of Tiger Smith. She didn't have a picture, but I got a good description.

"Later she married a man named Buck-

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ley. He was Joan's father. He died later and they moved to Denver, where I ran into them a year or so ago. Well, we got to writin' to each other, and yuh see—well, I—" Bill shrugged his shoulders dismally.

"That is an interesting story, Bill," said Henry quietly. "You never found Tiger Smith?"

The sheriff shook his head. "No, I don't know where he went. The world is a pretty big place. For years I bummed from coast to coast, always listenin' and lookin' for Tiger Smith. But I never heard of him. He'd change his name, of course."

"He may have died years ago," said Judge.

The sheriff looked up quickly. "I hope not, Judge—I want him. You see, the guard he killed, when he made his escape from the penitentiary, was another brother of mine. I was the only one of the family left; so I went out to get him—and failed."

"Bill," said Henry, "could the shooting of your wife have anything to do—"

"No, Henry. I've tried to figure it out from that angle. Tiger Smith ain't in Tonto City nor in Wild Horse Valley. No, there must be some other angle. God only knows what it is."

"Could it have been possible that the shot was meant for you?" asked Judge.

"I've tried to think so, Judge, but it don't work. The room was lighted, and the curtains were drawn apart. Only a blind man could have made that mistake."

"What about the killing of Sig Foster?" queried Judge.

The sheriff shook his head. "King Fisher says that only four of them knew that the gold was goin' out in that bedroll—him and Foster, Jim Stuart, the mine superintendent and Olds, the banker. It sure wasn't Fisher, and Stuart never left the mine. They'd sent one other shipment that way."

Henry told the sheriff about the masked man who had tied Albert Henshaw up in his hotel room and stolen the map and letters. It was the first time that the sheriff had heard about it. Henry called Albert from the main room, and Albert supplied the details.

"So this was the Jim Henshaw you was tryin' to trace, eh?" said the sheriff. "Tom South asked me about him, too."

"We thought at first," said Henry, "that the mummy we found in Smoke Tree Canyon might have been the missing Jim Henshaw, but a tiny gold locket on the mummy rather changed our ideas."

"I never heard about the locket," said the sheriff quickly.

"I know you didn't, Bill. We thought it might be a clue to the man's identity. On it were the initials L. L., which most certainly do not help identification."

Albert started to say something, but closed his lips momentarily. Then he said:

"The initials L. L.? Why, that works out! My uncle's wife, my aunt Laura, who died several years ago—her maiden name was Laura Lyman. Uncle Jim wore her locket!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Is that possible? Then the mummy *was* Jim Henshaw—bound hand and foot, shot through the head and dumped over the rim of Smoke Tree Canyon. Sheriff, you have a first-class murder mystery on your hands."

"Henry," replied the sheriff slowly, "I had two before this one came up."

"True, William—true. Do you know, there are times when I could shout and dance with joy."

"Why in the name of God would you want to shout and dance?" growled Judge.

"To think that I am not the sheriff of Tonto town."

THE sheriff's story of the identification of the Smoke Tree mummy brought John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney, out to the JHC ranch. The big, grizzled lawyer was anxious for more details. Henry and Judge greeted him warmly.

"It seems," he remarked, "that Wild Horse Valley has turned savage."

"It also seems," added Henry, "that I got out in time, John."

"At least, you are in a position where

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the newspapers can't write of your inability to cope with crime, Henry. Very soon they will take the hide off Bill Hawkins, I suppose. We have three murders on our hands, and not a single clue to the murderers. Henry, what do you think of the situation? Have you any idea?"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "You ask *me*?"

The prosecutor nodded soberly. "Yeah, that's right. What do you know about the letters this Albert Henshaw brought with him—and that map?"

"Little or nothing, John. Albert was robbed of them the night Mrs. Hawkins was murdered. From what Albert told us, Jim Henshaw, his uncle discovered a rich prospect. He was, I believe, grubstaked by King Fisher, and—"

"You know that to be a fact, Henry?" interrupted the lawyer.

"Someone grubstaked him, John. He located the Glory Hole in the name of King Fisher and himself. In this letter he told his sister that he did not trust the man who had grubstaked him, and so he filed a fake location, wanting to be sure of this man's honesty.

"In their agreement was a clause to the effect that if Jim Henshaw died, before or after development of any prospect he might discover, the full title to the property would go to the man who grubstaked him."

"Before or after, eh?" said the lawyer. "Henry, that letter, were it available, might be damning evidence against King Fisher."

"But it is not available," pointed out Judge.

"Could Albert Henshaw give any reasonable description of the man who robbed him of the letters?"

Henry shook his head. "I am afraid not, John. Judge, do you know where Albert is at this moment? We might ask him—"

"Albert, together with Oscar, Lightning and Frijole, went to Tonto in the buckboard an hour ago—shopping."

"I saw them in front of the King's Castle as I left town," said Campbell. "At least, I recognized Frijole and Oscar."

"I declared a payday this afternoon," said Henry.

"I have talked with Fisher about the murder of Foster," said the lawyer. "Some outsider knew about that gold."

"Or insider," added Henry dryly. Campbell looked at him curiously.

"Insider, eh? Meaning what and whom, Henry?"

Henry shook his head slowly. "I do not know, John. You know I am prone to foolish ideas. Mayhap I dream. However, my dreams never materialize; so they do little harm."

"Keep on dreaming, Henry," advised the lawyer. "You didn't do so badly, while in office. In fact, I wish you were back there."

"You would wish us back in that office?" gasped Judge.

"I would, Judge. You two may have queer ideas and a queer system of procedure, but you kept Wild Horse Valley clean."

"Thank you, John—thank you," said Henry gravely. "In fact, in the name of the Shame of Arizona, I thank you. I speak for all three Shames."

"NOT that I have anything against Bill Hawkins," said Campbell. "He is a fine type of man to hold that office, but between us, I don't believe Bill could follow a load of hay across a snow-covered meadow.

"He can only follow orders. And the death of his wife has wiped out everything else he may have had in his mind. I will admit that it was a terrible blow. But as a—well, detective—even the range type—he is as helpless as a child."

"As far as that goes, John," said Henry, "I do not believe that I ever gave the ghost of Sherlock Holmes any uneasy moments."

"You have imagination, Henry.

"He has!" snorted Judge. "Give him three drinks of Frijole's prune whisky, tuck him in bed and then mention one of

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the three murder cases on your hands at present, John. Why, his summation of evidence would turn Blackstone green with envy—and disgust."

"It is early yet," said Henry soberly, "but you might get the jug, Judge. Hast ever imbibed of Frijole's distillations, John?"

"No, but I have heard a lot about them."

"The powers of a supreme court and the odors of Araby, John. Hasten, my good Judge—the wassail bowl."

As Judge Van Treece went limping away to get the jug and glasses, John Campbell took two buckshot from his pocket and handed them to Henry.

"Two of the half-dozen that Doc Knowles took from the body of Mrs. Hawkins," he said.

Henry looked at them indifferently and handed them back.

"I—er—really, collecting deadly missiles is not my hobby, John."

"But examine those, Henry."

Henry looked at them closely, tested with a thumbnail and looked questioningly at the lawyer.

"They seem to be silver," he said. "They surely are not lead."

"Pure silver," replied the lawyer. "I had Tom South assay one, and he said they were nearly pure. The question is, who shoots silver buckshot?"

"We might advertise," suggested Henry dryly. "But what would be the advantage of a silver buckshot, John?"

The big lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows what the killer had in mind? Perhaps only a fanciful idea. Tom South suggested that they might penetrate deeper, being harder."

"Rather a high-toned murderer," said Henry.

"Yes."

"Well, here comes Judge with the jug; so we may as well forget the sordid side of life, John. I can only stand so much of it. Killings depress me; so away with them, say I."

"Not a bad idea," said the lawyer, laughing.

CHAPTER IX

SILVER BUCKSHOT

"YUH see," explained Frijole Bill Cullison, as he leaned against the bar at the King's Castle Saloon, "we've gotta git some flour, and we've gotta git some bakin' powder and we've gotta git some dried appercots and we've gotta git some sourdeens and we've gotta git some canned salmon and we've gotta git some—"

"You've got a awful lot of gottagits f'r a feller yore size," interrupted Spook, the deputy. "Whereat's the tenderfoot and Oscar?"

Frijole grinned.

"Oscar's gone to woo Josephine and Albert's done gone to the post-office for the mail, Spook."

"Oscar better watch his wooin'," said Spook. "Julius Larsen's been hangin' around her for the last few days. He's got himself a derby hat and a pair of yaller shoes, and if that ain't a sign of love, I'm an Apache. Have another drink, Frijole?"

"I'd hate to be in Larsen's yaller shoes, if Oscar suspects that Josephine is lookin' favorably upon him," mused Frijole. "Oh, yeah, another drink? Shore. This saloon whisky ain't got no velocity any more, Spook. She's like drinkin' milk."

"This'll grow hair on yore chest," declared the bartender.

"Tastes like hair restorer," admitted Frijole, "but if yo're hankerin' on doin' a first-class job of moultin', come out and sample my prune juice. Well, here's to yore saddle—may it never slip."

Albert came hurrying into the saloon. He was wearing his cowboy clothes and having trouble with the high-heel boots. He came up to the bar and drew a sheet of paper from an envelope.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "This is serious! Just came in the mail. I shall read it to you. It says:

" 'You have failed to heed my warning; so say your prayers.' "

Frijole scratched his stubbled chin thoughtfully.

"Know any?" he asked.

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"Any what?" queried Albert.

"Prayers. I used to know a good'n, but I jist can't remember it offhand. Used it a couple times, when I was in a tight spot, but it never got no results. Must be quite a chore for the Lord to keep check on all the incomin' prayers, at that."

"This," declared Albert, "is no jesting matter."

"Have a drink," invited Spook.

"I do such crazy things, when I take a drink. I simply can not remember what I did."

"That's why we drink," declared Frijole. "And then, if somebody shoots yuh, yuh don't even remember bein' shot. Take a drink, Albert."

"Well, I suppose so," agreed Albert dubiously. "My gracious!"

"Wasn't the letter signed?" asked Spook.

Albert gasped, choked over the drink and turned tearful eyes upon his questioner.

"It was signed Silver Buckshot," he whispered.

"Hell's delight!" blurted Spook. "Mrs. Hawkins was killed with Silver Buckshot! By golly, I've got a idea, Frijole. We'll foller Albert around and see who kills him. See what I mean?"

"Shore," agreed Frijole heartily. "We'll wait'll he shoots Albert and then we'll get him red-handed. Spook, you've got a head on yuh."

"But—but what about me?" queried Albert huskily.

"About you?" asked Frijole. "Oh, yo're just the bait. Say! Yuh don't mean to stand there and object to helpin' the law, do yuh? What kind of a whippoor-will are you, anyway, Albert? Why, the ord'nary man would jump at the chance."

"I know, but—" demurred Albert. "You do not realize—"

"I re'lize perfectly," interrupted Frijole coldly. "Yo're the kind of a man who would go to the Ladies' Aid Society meeting, packin' a white flag. Albert, I'm s'prised and pained."

"But you do not seem to realize that—" protested Albert.

"No, no!" interrupted Frijole. "Say no more, Albert. Bartender, if you can get yore mouth closed long enough to supply us with a few glasses of weak whisky—do so at once."

"I am very much afraid—" said Albert.

"Exactly!" snorted Frijole. "I knew you'd admit it. Well, here's to a brilliant scheme that went haywire, Spook."

ALBERT accepted another drink, had difficulty with his vocal cords, but managed to smile foolishly, after which he bought a round.

"Yo're awful new to this country," said Spook tolerantly. "After you've been here a couple of years you'll be delighted to give yore life for yore state—or vicinity. I've knowed people who have been here only a month who would give their life—well, even for their cattle spread."

"Well," said Albert dubiously, "I am unable to understand—"

"That's exactly it!" exclaimed Frijole. "He don't sabe. Albert, I'm sorry I misjudged yuh. Shake!"

"Well, that is mighty kind of you, Frijole. I'm sure, I—well, I want to do as others do."

"Spoken like an Arizonan!" exploded Frijole. "Let's have a drink."

Albert seemed so cheerful that he hardly grimaced over the bite of strong liquor. In fact, he became expansive.

"Silver Buckshot!" he snorted derisively. "The man is psychopathic."

"My God!" gasped Frijole. "What have we done?"

"Sounded like you'd hit the dictionary," said Spook. "Well, well! Here comes Oscar. Hyah, Oscar, have a drink."

Oscar leaned disconsolately on the bar, looking at them.

"Ay am hortsick," he announced.

"Albert," said Frijole, "show him the billie-doo yuh got from the Silver Buckshot."

"Ay am not interested in bockshot," declared Oscar.

"Somebody's goin' to kill Albert," said Frijole. Oscar looked at Albert curiously

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and offered to shake hands, but Albert ignored him.

"And," added Spook, "when the man shoots Albert, we'll get the man who shot him. It's shore a perfect scheme."

"Von't it be hord on Olbert?" asked Oscar.

"With a load of buckshot?" asked Frijole. "Why, he won't never know what hit him."

"Yah, su-ure. Ay t'ink somebody should buy drink liquor."

Albert bought the drinks. By this time he was rather uncertain in his movements, and managed to spill part of his drink.

"What makes yuh heartsick, feller?" asked Frijole.

"Yulius Lorsen," replied Oscar. "He got hord hat and yellow shoes and he is out vit Yosephine. Dey vent some place in a boggy. Ay t'ink Ay am t'rough vit vimmin. Va'al, Ay vill buy drink now."

The King's Castle was rapidly filling up with patrons, as a mining crew came off shift; so the boys went outside.

"Ay don't like crowds," declared Oscar. "Ay am like vounded animal—Ay vant to soffer alone."

"We're goin' home," declared Frijole. "For once in our lives, we're goin' home sober, too."

"Tha's good idea," applauded Albert, and he fell off the sidewalk.

"Can yuh imagine that!" snorted Frijole. He started to step off the sidewalk, caught his heel on the edge and fell over Albert.

"Ay don't even t'ink that's funny," said Oscar gloomily. Spook whooped with mirth and slid down alongside a porch post to a sitting position on the sidewalk.

"Goin' home sober," he jeered. "Yo're as drunk as a bull-fiddler at a river-pig's ball, Frijole."

Frijole helped Albert back to the sidewalk, and Albert wanted to buy another drink.

"You've had 'nough," declared Frijole. "Don'tcha remember that yo're a marked man. No use wastin' a lotta good liquor on a dyin' man."

"Where's Danny?" asked Albert. "I wan' to tell him."

"I seen him with Bill Hawkins a while ago," said Spook. "I think he's visitin' Miss Buckley. Why don'tcha go down and find him, Albert?"

"Would that be pup-proper?" queried Albert huskily.

"It'd be Arizony," said Frijole. "You know where the house is?"

"Oh, def'nitely," replied Albert. "I wish you a good-evening."

And Albert went across the street, weaving in the darkness.

"There's a fine boy," declared Frijole. "A perfec' gentleman if I ever sheen one. I hope he has nice funeral. Now, I'll buy drink."

DANNY REGAN had supper with Joan Buckley and Bill Hawkins. Joan was a fine cook, which Frijole was not, and Danny thoroughly enjoyed the meal, especially cooked and served by a girl as pretty and charming as Joan. She was still greatly upset over the death of her mother.

Bill Hawkins said finally, "Joan wants to go back to Denver, Danny."

"That ain't so good," said Danny, "but yuh can't blame her. Tonto City is a pretty tough place for a young woman. I was kinda hopin' she might like it here. But when yuh figure it out there ain't much entertainment for any woman."

"I have to make my own way in the world," said Joan.

Bill Hawkins nodded slowly. "Yeah, I know how yuh feel, Joan. I can only give yuh what I'd give my own daughter."

"It isn't that," she said quickly. "You have been wonderful to me, and I'll always be grateful. But there is nothing for me in Tonto City. I don't want to be dependent on anyone."

"Yuh would if yuh got married, Joan," said the sheriff quietly.

"I never thought of that." She laughed. "Now, yuh take Danny, for instance. If he—"

"And that," said Danny quickly, "is

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about all a woman would take me for, Bill. What have I got to offer a woman? Sixty dollars a month, and a swell chance to be a widow, if my cinch slips or the bronc steps into a gopher hole."

"That's what I used to think," said Hawkins soberly. "Think of the years I lost. A man don't stay young very long—nor a woman either, as far as that goes. Yuh never get that youth back, Danny."

"No, that's true, Bill. But love and poverty don't mix. Mebbe, when my ship comes in—some day."

The sheriff started to speak, but changed his mind and looked toward the front door. Someone had walked across the little wooden sidewalk just away from the porch, but inside the yard. Then they heard footsteps near the back of the house and coming up on the kitchen porch.

They were all on their feet. Danny stepped away, loosening the Colt revolver inside the waistband of his trousers, when he saw a flash of a masked face and the glint of lamplight on the barrel of a shotgun outside the front window.

He stepped quickly in front of Joan, flinging her aside, and went into action. Five shots blasted from his forty-five, smashing the window to pieces. The room shuddered from the concussion of the shots.

The sheriff was on his knees, gun in hand, trying to see what Danny was shooting at. Then Danny dropped his empty gun, took the sheriff's gun from his hand and dived for the front door; he flung it open and was outside, off the porch, crashing into a man. They went down together in some shrubbery, and he sheriff piled out after them.

"I've got him, Bill!" panted Danny.

TOGETHER they soon rendered the man helpless, and carried him into the house, where Joan, wide-eyed and frightened, waited for them.

"We've got the killer!" exclaimed Danny, and turned the man over.

Then Danny let loose of him and stood up, panting.

"Albert, where in hell did you come from?" he asked huskily.

Albert sat up and rubbed a swelling eye.

"What was all the shooting about?" he asked.

Danny shook his head and looked at the sheriff. "I dunno what to say, Bill. I saw a masked man with a rifle or a shotgun out there—and this is what I caught."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Albert. "My eye is almost shut."

"Yuh smell like a distillery," said Danny.

"I presume so," agreed Albert. "You see, I received a warning note in the mail this evening. That is, it was a notification that I am about to die. So we possibly drank too much. I—I hope you understand what I am saying.

"Then I wanted you to know about it, and Mr. Spook told me that you came down here. I intended coming to the front door, but I got tangled up with a tree, it seems, and went to the back door, when I heard all the shooting. That right eye really must be a sight, Danny."

"Hang a blanket over that busted window, Bill," said Danny.

"There's a shade," said the sheriff, and yanked it down.

"It was signed Silver Buckshot," said Albert.

"Yore note was, eh?" said the sheriff. "I'll be darned!"

Danny turned to Joan. "I shore hope I didn't hurt yuh, when I gave yuh that shove. I had to get yuh out of line with that feller."

"It only frightened me," she said. "I—I didn't know what it was all about."

"I don't blame yuh," said Danny grimly. "After hearin' about that note, I reckon this killer was lookin' for a chance to blast Albert."

"Frijole says I am a marked man," said Albert.

Quite a number of Tonto folks had heard the shots, and were making an investigation. Among them were Oscar, Frijole, Spook and Lightning. King Fisher and several of the men from the King's

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Castle were in the crowd that swarmed into the sheriff's home.

Fisher said to Albert, "Why don't you leave here, young man?"

"Because I do not like to run away," replied Albert.

"Rather die, eh?"

"I am still alive, I believe, Mr. Fisher."

"You've got a fine chance against a man with a shotgun—in the dark."

"Yes, I realize that."

Danny said to Frijole, "Bring the buckboard down here, will yuh? I don't believe that Silver Buckshot gentleman will chance a potshot."

"Ay yust vant to get a hand on him," said Oscar. "Ay vould yust yank him aport like spreeng chicken."

Frijole brought the buckboard down there and Albert climbed aboard with Oscar, Frijole and Lightning, and they turned the corner onto the main street on two wheels.

"Oscar isn't takin' any chances on a wing-shot," said the sheriff.

King Fisher and the crowd drifted away, leaving Joan, Danny and the sheriff at the house. Joan was still nervous and excited.

"Why is this Silver Buckshot trying to shoot Albert?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," replied Danny, "but Henry's theory may be right. He says that either the man is afraid that Albert remembers that map, or that the man is afraid to locate that lost mine, thinking it will implicate him in more serious trouble. Then maybe he's lost the map. And Bill," Danny turned to the sheriff and lowered his voice, "I believe that King Fisher knows more than he'll tell."

"You mean—about the Silver Buckshot, Danny?"

"Yeah. Bill, I was watchin' his face, when the Silver Buckshot was mentioned. And if yuh think it over—King Fisher hasn't said anythin' about the murder of Foster and the loss of that gold."

"Well, yeah, he hasn't said much, Danny. Kinda dropped it. But I can't figure King Fisher in on a deal like this, Danny. I know all about him grubstakin' Jim Henshaw, the prospector, but that still don't—well, I dunno."

"It's shore a tough one," admitted Danny grimly. "We'll have to ride herd on Albert pretty close, or we'll have another killin' to work on."

"Keep him away from here," said the sheriff.

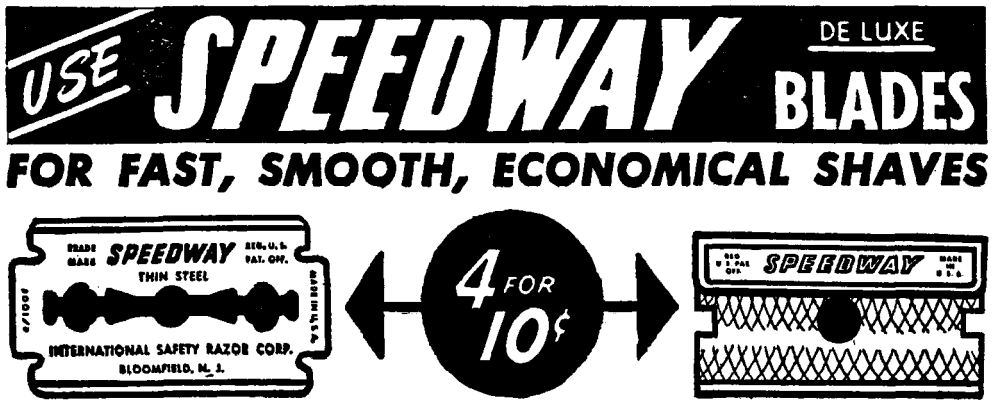
Danny grinned.

"I'd do that, anyway," he said. "I hope I'm not barred, Bill."

"Certainly not," said Joan quickly. "You are welcome any time."

She met Danny's eyes, and the color came quickly into her face, but she did not turn her glance away. Suddenly, then, Danny forgot all about the Silver Buckshot.

"That's yore answer, Danny." The sheriff grinned.



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CHAPTER X

TAKE A MILLION, LITTLE BROTHER

HENRY and Judge went to Tonto next morning, after listening to the report of Danny Regan regarding the attempt to kill Albert.

"Wild Horse Valley is going to the dogs," declared Judge. "While our regime may have been a blot on the State of Arizona, we kept the malefactors at a distance—or jailed them, Henry. Looking at it in retrospect, we were an efficient pair of peace officers."

"Careful, Judge," warned Henry. "Your old muscles haven't enough elasticity to allow you to pat yourself on the back. Unless I am mistaken, it was you who dubbed us the Shame of Arizona."

"Only in jest, my friend—only in jest. The newspapers adopted it later. However, we were able to cope with crime. If we were in office now—"

"You would be crying upon my shoulder," finished Henry. "How well I know you, Judge. No, I have no ambitions in that direction. Let Vinegar Bill Hawkins do the suffering. Let the commissioners haunt his dreams, demanding immediate action—or else.

"Let the newspapers of Scorpion Bend write editorials, saying that Wild Horse Valley is a mecca for criminals. Hank Conroy and Horse-face Van Treece are merely cattlemen, free, white and twenty-one—and slaves of no one, sir."

"I do not like that Horse-face, Henry."

Henry gestured casually.

"Merely a sudden inspiration, Judge. I happened to catch you in profile. However, neither of us are counterparts of Adonis. I wonder how John Campbell is feeling after his libations. When a man of extreme dignity will mount a horse backwards, slap the animal across the tail with his hat and yell, 'To hell with law and order!' his libations have been, to say the least—potent."

Judge cleared his throat raspingly. "He merely seemed to express the sentiment of the country, Henry."

"Do not be too hard on the country, my friend. We live here, and at least, we are honest and law-abiding."

"And still," mused Judge, "I do not understand why that die came up a six, when a few minutes later it would only come up a deuce."

"You stoop to trivialities, my dear sir," said Henry. "Bringing up the eccentricities of a die, when the country reeks with crime. Isn't there something about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel? But you are prone to do that. Queer fellow, you."

"Perhaps, Henry, perhaps. But what to do about Albert? If this blood-hungry murderer, who calls himself the Silver Buckshot, is so intent on Albert's untimely demise, is there anything to prevent him from coming out to the ranch and accomplishing his deadly purpose, to the risk of all of us? The mere thought of a shotgun loaded with silver buckshot contracts my stomach. It is a damnable weapon."

"Why shrink from silver in particular?" queried Henry. "Lead, gold, or even diamonds in a shotgun aimed at me are equally unpleasant. But as far as prevention is concerned, I have no ideas on the subject."

"I feel that Albert should leave, Henry."

"I feel that we should get the Silver Buckshot," said Henry. "After all, Albert has done no wrong. Why should he go?"

"You have a strange philosophy, sir. Because he has done no harm, you would endanger all of us. It is all very well to say that we should get the Silver Buckshot. But how?"

"We must concentrate, Judge," explained Henry. "Suspicion and elimination. Finally—the Silver Buckshot."

"Have you suspected and eliminated anyone yet, Henry?"

"Oh, merely as a preliminary I selected you and me. Then I eliminated myself."

Judge said sharply:

"Well, what about me?"

"I needed a little more time on your case than I did on mine, Judge."

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THEY stopped at the sheriff's office where they found Spook. The lanky deputy wanted to know if Albert got home safely, and when Albert might come back to Tonto City.

"If he comes, I want to go," declared Spook. "I ain't never seen a shotgun yet that didn't scatter awful wide."

"Has the sheriff found any clues?" asked Judge.

"Well, I'll tell yuh," replied Spook, "until they start makin' clues six feet wide and twelve feet tall, and paintin' 'em red, white and blue, Bill Hawkins won't ever recognize one.

"If I could only convince him that my brains are wasted while I got to stay here in the office, we might git somewhere. If a feller walked right up to Bill and said, 'Lock me up, pardner, I'm the Silver Buckshot,' Bill would argue him out of it. He's the most disbelieving hombre I ever knowed. Why, he said this mornin' that if another murder is committed around here, he's goin' to resign and go dirt farmin'."

"How does Miss Buckley feel about it?" asked Judge.

"You'll have to ask her, Judge. Bill's scared she might marry me if I ever got a chance to talk with her. She might, at that. I think she's goin' back to Denver. Least Bill says she wants to."

"How is Roy Fisher getting along?" asked Henry.

"That pup!" snorted Spook. "Well, I'm sorry to say he's doin' all right. I seen King Fisher in the bank this mornin', and he said Roy is all right. That's a lie on the face of it. King Fisher drawed out a roll of bills that would choke a burro, and when he seen me lookin', he slid 'em under his coat. Mebbe he thought I might hold him up for his roll. I heard Olds, the banker, sayin', 'I've got all the numbers'."

Judge and Henry left the office and wandered up the street.

"I've got all the numbers," muttered Henry. Judge looked at him.

"What did you say, Henry?" he asked.

"Thinking aloud," said Henry. "Let us drop in and see how Tom South is doing."

Tom South, the assayer, grimy as usual, was busy with a retort, but came out to see what they wanted. South was usually short and to the point, not given to much conversation. Henry said:

"You heard that the mummy was identified as Jim Henshaw, Tom?"

"Yeah, I heard he was."

"You knew him, I believe."

"Jist like I knew a lot of desert rats and prospectors. Didn't remember much about him, except that he was in here a couple of times. I'm too busy most of the time to bother about makin' friends. Got to make a livin'. I'm busy on some stuff for King Fisher right now, and if you'll excuse me—"

"Oh, certainly," said Henry quickly. "We just dropped in, you know."

"I guess King Fisher keeps Tom busy most of the time," said Judge, as they went down the street.

"That is nice for Tom," said Henry. "Not much outside work now. They say he is a very good assayer. I do not know how he stands the odor of acids all day and half the night. I suppose one gets hardened in time."

They made a few purchases at the general store, and climbed back into the buckboard.

"Have you made any more suspects or eliminations, Henry?" queried Judge, as they drove out of town.

"No, I am still working on your case, Judge," replied Henry.

ABOUT two miles north of Tonto City there is an old abandoned adobe beside the road to Scorpion Bend. It was an old stage station, and marks the original site of Tonto City. There are no windows or doors left, some parts of the thick walls have fallen in and many of the hand-made tiles are missing from the roof. The once-cleared yard is grown up with cactus and desert growth partly screening the ruin from the road.

It was siesta time, being just short of mid-afternoon. Thunder and Lightning

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Mendoza had dismounted in the broad shade afforded by the rear wall of the adobe, and were stretched out on the ground.

"W'at you are theenking of theese Seelver Bockshot?" asked Lightning sleepily. Thunder brushed a bug off his nose and settled to a more comfortable position in the sand.

"*Quien sabe?*" he muttered. "Nobody ees knowing heem. Me, myself personally I am theenking he ees a bom."

"He keels from quite a few peoples, my leetle brodder."

"For wheech, I am asking? He don' get no money from keeling. I theenk he ees crazy yourself. Hm-m-m, I theenk I seet on some ant."

"Maybe he ees scorpion or sidewinder," said Lightning, yawning. "I theenk I tak' leetle sleep. Last night I have *mucho* tequila, and I ween feefty centavos playing weeth jomping-bean. I weesh I am having too much money for the time being."

"Sure," said Thunder. "I like for being reech one time or another. Never have for work, fine clothes, vino for my deener and tequila for breakfast. Plenty beef and frijole on the table. W'at you do weeth too much money?"

But only a snore was the answer. Lightning was asleep. Thunder brushed away a few more crawling bugs, yawned luxuriously and started to turn over, when he heard a sound. It was the slow hoofbeats of a horse, and they stopped at the front of the adobe. There was an old window opening only a few feet away; so Thunder moved over quietly and poked an inquisitive eye around the corner.

For nearly a minute he remained motionless. Then a horse went galloping away, and Thunder turned, a quizzical expression on his coffee-colored face. He rubbed his nose and looked at the sleeping Lightning. He started to call to him, but changed his mind, turned back and crawled through the window opening.

There was no floor in the building, and the ground was littered with broken adobe and debris. But Thunder went straight to a large hunk of adobe, turned it over and picked up a paper package, which had been wrapped tightly. It was quite a sizeable package, at that. Then he went back through the window and hunkered down in the shade; he cut away the wrappings and disclosed the contents. For a moment he stared wide-eyed at the contents of the package. Then he yelled:

"*Dios Mio!* Lightning! W'at in the hell!"

LIGHTNING sat up like a jack-in-the-box, blinking, his mouth sagging. His eyes shifted to Thunder's two hands. He brushed a lock of black hair away from his eyes and took another look.

"You are not driming, I hope," he said foolishly.

"One meelion dollar!" whispered Thunder. "We are reech!"

Lightning crawled over close and touched his fingers to the package of currency, trying to make sure that it was real. He looked closely at Thunder and said:

"Look me square in your eye, my leetle brodder. Who you keel?"

"I keel nobody. Leesten! A man hide theese money under piece dirt in the adobe. I see heem. When he ees gone—I tak' heem."

"So-o-o? You are a thiff, eh? That ees not my money. Don' you know eet ees wrong for stealing?"

"Sure. Judge ees saying that thiff never go to Heaven."

"I know. But how he ees knowing? He never go there. Hm-m-m-m. You theenk theese man throw that money away?"

"I theenk he don' want heem no more—I hope and pray."

"Sure. Maybe he got so much money he got no place put heem. W'at we better do?"

Thunder thought over the question. Finally he said:

"How much you wan'?"

"Oh, I go feefty-feefty weeth you. I am no hog, you hope."

"Sure. I theenk we better go way from

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here, biffore we count heem. Go quick."

"You got lot brain in my head. Come on."

They mounted quickly and rode away to a spot about a mile from the adobe, where they sat down in the shade to count their spoils. But the process was not a success, because neither of them could count to ten. Finally Lightning made the separation by the simple process of "one for you and one for me," regardless of the fact that one might be twenty dollars and another a dollar.

"Now," stated Lightning, "we are too reech for working. I theenk we queet the job and go to Mejico."

"For the brain," declared Thunder, "you have lot sawdust. Maybe that man ees coming back weeth more money. He got plenty."

"How you know he got plenty money?"

"I know heem." Thunder grinned.

"You know heem—sure? Who he was?"

"Keeng Feesher."

"Good! He got so much money that eef he come back and never find those money under the dirt, you weel never mees heem."

"I theenk," said Thunder, "that we better keep your mouth shut. We got sicret, my leetle brodder."

"Sicrit? W'at ees a sicret?"

"A sicrit ees sometheeng you do not know, biccause nobody ees telling me. You onnerstand?"

"Oh, sure. I hope my shirt-tail don' pull out, biccause I'm lose lots money. I theenk I buy pocketbook. You wan' sleep leetle bit?"

"I am too reech to sleep now on the ground. I buy me damn nice bed. How are you filling, my reech leetle brodder?"

"I am filling just like Presidente of Mejico."

"How he ees filling, huh?"

"Weeth hees finger. Ho, ho, ho! Good joke, eh?"

"Sure," agreed Thunder, "but how he ees filling?"

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Author of "Gold at Black-knife," "The Lives of Handsled Burke," etc.

CHAPTER I

HANDSLED, WELCOME HOME

TWO passengers boarded the northbound plane for Rickman's Lode one snapping midwinter morning as the subarctic dawn was breaking. A trim woman in her late thirties, whose modish city garb had been sensibly improved for the climate by the addition of woolen outerstockings and overshoes; and a tall, rugged man of middle age with bleak eyes and a determined mouth. They had a nodding acquaintance, having flown together from Edmonton the previous afternoon.

The pilot said: "You're Mrs. Dale?" and put his hand on a seat. "You'll be comfortable here." He lifted his eyes to the big man, and his jaw dropped.

"Am I seeing things!"

"No." The man smiled. "It's me all right. Handsled Burke. How are you, Evans? My old friend Stevens still running things at Rickman's?"

"Yes," answered the pilot, "and I don't think he'll get the band out to welcome you, either. In fact, I'll bet he wouldn't let us sell you a seat on this plane if he could help it."

"I believe you," said Burke. "Stevens' devotion to the Company's interests is amazing."

"Um." The pilot fingered his chin. "Can't blame him much where you and that moose partner of yours are concerned." He turned to his co-pilot. "When you get in touch with Rickman's, tell 'em we have Handsled Burke. That will give the police a chance to hide and the company can nail down anything that's loose."

The pilot chuckled at his own pleasantry.

THE two-hundred-mile flight to Rickman's Lode was monotonous. The flat panorama was much the same. Endless forests of spruce, patterned with the white ribbands of frozen river and the myriad irregular patches of swamp and lakes.

Mountains showed as a vague line in the extreme west, nearing somewhat as the plane proceeded, so that bare, lifeless fangs broke the distant skyline. The McKenzies. A northern offshoot of the Rockies; unmapped, unexplored, virtually unknown.

Rickman's Lode swam into sight—the far north metropolis that had blossomed in the space of three years under the potent touch of yellow gold and the astute direction of Stevens, the resident manager. Handsled Burke allowed a smile to crease the stern lines of his face. He had been one of the first at Rickman's. He had worked for the Amalgamated Company—and against them. He had made a modest fortune, and lost it in the civilization he had almost forgotten.

Burke's lips tightened confidently. There were fortunes to be made in this country yet. There was one fortune, at least, and he thought he knew where it lay among the barren mountains of the west.

"Here we are," said the pilot as they slid to a stop before the hangar. "Rickman's Lode, in the never-never lands." He

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Swen came down the slope like an enraged grizzly

switched off the motors. "I see the police waiting for you, Burke." He grinned, and meeting Burke's level gaze he abruptly became serious.

"You can ride up to the hotel with the mail car," he said to Mrs. Dale.

Burke alighted last. The cold bit through his overcoat and nipped at his ears, and he paused a moment; then a huge man in a caribou parka leaped at him. A man whose fur hood topped Burke's hat by inches and whose bulk dwarfed Burke's.

"Burke!" With exuberant delight the huge man lifted him off the ground by his arms and held him slantingly above his head. "Burke! By golly, I'm glad to see you."

"Put me down then," said Burke, laughing. "Put me down, Swen."

"Yah," Swen chuckled. "By golly, Burke, I'm glad to see you!"

He lowered Burke easily to the ground. "Give me that grip. Come on quick or you'll freeze your ears."

Burke lifted his hand to a tall young man in a short bearskin coat and a wedge police cap.

"Hi, Swanson! See you sometime."

The policeman waved back. Burke did not miss his wry grin.

Swen's cabin, half a mile out of town, was warm. Burke had run the entire distance with his hands over his ears but his breathing was not distressed when he entered. Swen looked at him critically.

"You ain't soft, Burke. You ain't puffing. I was afraid you'd be soft, living in the city. More than a year now."

"A lot of time." Burke stripped off his overcoat. "I'm soft, Swen, compared to what I used to be, but not too bad. Well,

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you old Turk—you got any money left of that fifty thousand?"

"Not a sou markee," sighed Swen happily. "Man, I had some fun with that money. Shucks, it didn't last long. Hey, Burke, I guess you're broke too."

"I'm right down to bedrock," agreed Burke. "Got enough for a grubstake and that's enough for now."

He tossed a small round object on the table. It thudded heavily rolling to the edge. "We travel, eh?"

Swen pounced on the pellet, holding it up eagerly between his fingers. "The platinum bullet the Injuns made! Burke, I knew you'd come back to find that platinum. Hey, Burke, we'll get rich yet."

"I told you two years, and the prospect was yours, if I didn't come back," said Burke soberly. "Now it's ours. We hit the trail again, Swen—once more before we're too old. We need the money for our old age."

"Don't lie to me, Burke." Swen dropped the little leaden ball on the table. "You want money, sure. But you get more kick out of looking for it than finding it. You're yust like me, Burke. You're a tough guy and the tougher the going is the better you like it. Yah! Money and us don't get along."

Burke grinned. "This trip will be plenty tough, Swen. It was tough enough when we did it in the summertime."

Swen nodded. "We wouldn't be doing it in the winter if you hadn't flagged that company plane with a fire and made 'em fly us out because I was going to cash in with a bum appendix." Swen drew a deep breath. "Well, it turns out to be an ace in the hole, Burke, because they sure got no use for us in Rickman's. Stevens won't even give me a yob or a meal in the company boarding house or hotel. Yah! He don't know about this placer lake, though."

"Stoke up the fire and fry me a caribou steak," said Burke briskly. "And we'll talk. Then I'll buy me an outdoor outfit and we'll travel, Swen. It will have to be siwash. No sleeping bags, eh? We can't wait till summer."

THEY were sitting in the leisurely aftermath of a hearty meal when someone tapped at the door and called: "Hello, this house."

"Come in," boomed Swen. "Come in, Charley, but leave your handcuffs outside."

Constable Charley Dicks lifted the latchstring and entered. He kicked snow from his rubbers, shrugged out of his parka and flashed them a smile. A shortish, chunky lad with his white father's clear-cut features and his Indian mother's dark skin and eyes.

"I'm sure taking a chance in the lions' den." His hand went across the table. "Hello, Handsled. We hoped you were gone for good. I suppose you come back to kill me? I—Ow! You're breaking my hand."

Dicks surveyed his limp fingers critically. "Damn you, Burke. You're as mean and vicious as ever."

"Sit down, Charley," invited Burke. "And have some coffee. Is this a social call or did you come to deliver an ultimatum?"

To their surprise Dicks sat stiffly back. "I guess—" his embarrassment was noticeable. "I guess it's an ultimatum all right."

Swen paused with the coffee pot in his hand. Burke said calmly: "Go on, Swen. Fill his cup."

"Hell of a thing to tell you the minute you hit town," Dicks reached for the can of condensed milk. "But I'm saving Swanson the job. He's a sergeant now, did you know?"

"Stevens, eh?" queried Burke softly. "Mr. Stevens. the big shot. Started already, has he?"

Dicks nodded. "That's a fair guess."

"What's the deadline?" demanded Burke. "And does he give any reason?"

"Ah—" Dicks shrugged slightly. "You know how it is. I live in a Company house. A nice steam-heated four-room house with a bathroom and all those things. You got to be born and raised in a cabin like this before you appreciate 'em. The wife, too, and the kid. Be mighty easy for the Company to need that house of mine for some of their own men."

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"So?" Burke mused. "Have they turned on the heat yet?"

"No," admitted Dicks. "It isn't as raw as that, but you know how it is. Swanson got shoved along pretty quick since he came up here. All he needs is a good big boost from Amalgamated and he'll be an inspector. A knock from Amalgamated would fix that chance permanently. Stevens pulls plenty of weight if he wants to use it."

"Okay," said Burke. "You've made it clear that you will put the bee on us. What's the charge going to be?"

"Ah, now—" Dicks made an exasperated motion of his hand. "Don't take us wrong. I'm only showing you how we stand with the Company. What I mean is: They don't want you here and they have said so.

"Put your mind at rest," said Burke evenly, but his eyes were hard. "We are so thoughtful of the welfare of the Company that we are going to go places right away. That should be good news for them."

Dicks looked at him steadily. Burke stared back. Finally Dicks said:

"That's just what they are afraid of."

"Here, here," Swen spoke up. "You got to come clean, Charley. They don't want us here and they won't let us go. That don't make sense."

"I know it doesn't," Dicks sighed. "I guess you know more about it than I do. I don't know what it is all about, but I do know this. The field crew of Amalgamated is pulling out tomorrow with three dog teams and when the field men go out in the bush in the wintertime it means something important! See? Maybe they figure you got the same kind of business on."

Burke glanced at Swen, who shook his head, baffled. Burke said:

"All right, Charley. We'll play ball. We'll push off at the high port, just as soon as I can get some traveling clothes. We want a little grub, too. And we'll tell Swanson where we are going. We will tell him exactly where—and why."

"Okay." Dicks stood up. "Swanson will be glad to know that. Maybe he'll forget that you two haven't much of a rep for telling anybody where you are going—any time."

CHAPTER II

MACKINAW MAYHEM

HALF an hour later Burke and Swen entered the general store and were mildly surprised to find several men selecting supplies. Burke said: "Dicks was right. The Company is up to something. This bunch doesn't look like miners. I wonder what—"

A broad man stepped back quickly and turned half-around. The movement was so abrupt that Burke, although he swerved instinctively, was unable to dodge a collision. The broad man, lacking but little of Burke's height, thrust out his hand to Burke's chest and pushed him back a step.

"So you need the whole store, mister."

Burke stepped further back and bumped Swen. Swen said: "Hey, what's this?"

Burke put out his arms and blocked Swen from passing him in the aisle. Behind the man who had bumped him were half a dozen others like him—tough capable men, seasoned by the North.

"Sorry," said Burke smoothly. The collision had been deliberately intentional. "Sorry, old man. Clumsy of me. Hope I didn't hurt you."

Someone laughed. The broad man was taken aback. He had a long-nosed fighting face and a thin mouth that twisted into a grin of disbelief as he said:

"I heard you were a tough guy. Aren't you the man they call Handsled Burke?"

"Yes." Burke nodded, still very polite. "And may I ask your name?"

Someone spoke behind the broad man, importantly. "That's Cat McDowell, prospecting boss for Amalgamated, Burke. You want to take a good look at him so you'll be able to keep out of his way when you meet him again."

Swen growled in Burke's ear. "Watch yourself, Burke. Them guys is mean."

It was a none too subtle attempt to provoke a fight, and Burke dodged the issue.

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He said quietly: "Glad to meet you, McDowell. We'll have a talk sometime but I came in here to get some stuff." He caught the eye of the clerk behind the counter, and that man shook his head.

"So?" Burke was beginning to understand. The Company had turned on the heat. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

His voice remained even.

"My orders are that you can't buy anything in this store," said the clerk quietly. "You better talk to the manager. That's him over there in the hardware."

The store manager was short and baldish and his eyes were worried as he came forward in response to Burke's beckoning finger.

"The lad here tells me we are on the black list," Burke said quietly. "Does that mean that we can't buy ordinary supplies?"

The manager looked at Burke and Swen, then his gaze flicked to McDowell and his henchmen who stood in a solid knot. He nodded soberly.

"I'm sorry, but that is it. Handsled Burke and Two-horse Swen cannot buy anything here."

"Well—"

Burke turned and Cat McDowell was eyeing him speculatively, his men behind him ready and making no effort to appear otherwise. From the tail of his eye Burke could see three more men unobstrusively closing in behind Swen.

The trap was baited. One incautious word and there would be a fight, with the partners on the short end of it. Swen whispered: "Hit 'em hard, Burke."

"No." Burke shook his head warningly. "Come on, Swen. We're wasting time. If the Amalgamated won't sell us anything we might as well go."

The three men behind Swen gave them room as they made for the street door. Cat McDowell stood gazing after them and spoke his disappointment.

"So that's this loud noise, Handsled Burke, is it? He hasn't got half the sand that big moose partner of his has. Something tells me this Burke has been kind of overrated in this neck of the woods."

MRS. DALE was in the police office when they entered. Burke bowed and placed his hat on the desk behind which stood Sergeant Swanson.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said to Mrs. Dale, "but it will only take a moment. Look, Swanson; the Company refuses to sell us any supplies."

Swanson rolled a pen between his palms and his eyes were troubled.

"As I understand it, this store operates under a trades license," Burke continued. "That means the premises are considered a public place and the public may buy goods at a price set by the Company. We wish to pay cash for certain articles that are on sale and there is no reason for refusing us. No legitimate reason, I mean. There isn't any shortage and everyone knows it. Now—can the Amalgamated Company discriminate against Swen and me—and get away with it?"

"What they can legally do and what they may actually do are two different things," said Swanson. "But there happens to be a lot behind this, Burke. The Amalgamated Company don't want you here and you must know it. They don't feel safe with you around. You've tangled with them before and you came out on top. Better let it rest at that."

"You are evading the issue," Burke snapped.

"Oh, forget the Company," advised Swanson, a shade impatiently. "They have something on themselves just now—doing a lot of field explorations. Consolidating their prospects and so on, and maybe they haven't any outfits to waste at present.

"But anyhow I have a job all picked out for you. Mrs. Dale wants a couple of guides to go out into the bush. I've told her that you and Swen—this is Two-horse Swen, Mrs. Dale" (Swen ducked his head and grinned a terrific gap-tooth grin)—"that you and Swen would take her any place she wanted to go and bring her back safely again."

Burke shook his head. His jaw was grim and his eyes hard.

"Some other time we would be delighted

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to guide Mrs. Dale anywhere. But now we have a very important job to do. Swanson, I want an outfit and I want it now."

"Where are you going, that you're in such an all-fired hurry?" asked Swanson. "Going trapping?"

"No." said Burke coldly. "We are not going trapping. Do we get simple ordinary justice as British citizens, or don't we?"

"You aren't a British citizen, Burke," Swanson reminded him softly, "and the nationality of Swen is a matter of conjecture. He looks like a Minnesota Swede to me." Swen grinned broadly. "But—"

He reached for the desk monophone and said: "This is Sergeant Swanson. I want to speak to Mr. Stevens, please."

Shortly, they heard a click and a faint voice croaked. "Yes, Swanson."

"Burke and Swen are here," said Swanson quietly, "and they claim your store is licensed as a public place and that they are legally entitled to purchase supplies from you."

Stevens' reply was inaudible as Swanson held the earpiece tightly, but they saw his jaw set stubbornly.

"Um. But I'm afraid they are right. The store isn't like a camp commissary. You should sell them what necessities they need. You can limit it, of course, but they should be able to buy what they can carry away. Burke claims he wants to go into the bush and—"

They heard Stevens snort angrily. "We know damn well he wants to go into the bush. Why do you think we don't want to outfit them?"

"Well . . ." Swanson looked hot and uncomfortable, "they have an argument, Mr. Stevens."

Swanson held the phone for another half-minute and his face was a study. He replaced the receiver slowly.

"All right, Burke. You can get what you need. What you can carry. Stevens was a bit huffy. Have you seen him yet?"

"No," said Burke. "I haven't had the pleasure. And I'm not hankering for it. Come on, Swen."

He picked up his hat and saw Mrs. Dale was regarding him gravely, speculatively.

"I apologize for stamping in here this way, Mrs. Dale," he said. "Swen and I would like to take you on that trip but we have some serious traveling on tap. I think Swanson here will get you somebody reliable, though. He has his finger on everything and everybody in this whole country."

Mrs. Dale smiled. "It's quite all right, Mr. Burke."

At the door Burke paused an instant: "Thanks, Swanson, I hope it won't make trouble for you."

Swanson shrugged his trim shoulders. His face was glum.

THE partners met Cat McDowell in front of the store. He said: "You birds still here?" and made it a sneer.

"Why not," countered Burke easily and pushed open the door. Swen stopped at the grocery counter, but Burke sought the dry goods section and the clerk who had previously refused to serve him.

"Two suits of all-wool underwear, the largest size you have. Half a dozen pairs of heavy socks. One of those gray wool topshirts"—he pointed—"one windbreaker and a canvas parka, a wool toque, couple of pairs of wool mitts and leather pullovers. Mackinaw pants, and a packsack."

Burke selected the clothing rapidly. He was unable to buy moccasins to fit so he chose a pair of low rubbers instead. The whole made a bulky load in the packsack.

The clerk wordlessly made out the bill. Burke scanned it hastily, took a wallet from his pocket and stripped off bills from a thin sheaf.

"A dollar eighty cents over," he said briskly. "Keep the change."

He swung the pack to his back as Swen came up with a paper package of groceries. Swen was almost running.

"I dassent wait. We fight, Burke. There is a dozen of them. They are going to gang us."

From the front door converged Cat McDowell with a knot of men behind him. Down an aisle behind Swen stalked another

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group. Swen said: "That's Treloar and his diamond-drill gang, Burke. You beat it out the back door with that stuff and I'll hold them."

"No." Burke tossed the packsack under a table and tore off his overcoat. "Let them start it, Swen. And be careful. Don't kill anybody. This is a frame-up."

Cat McDowell said: "I thought you were going some place, Burke?"

"Sure, we are," Burke answered. "There are too many skunks around here. Skunks that run in packs."

"Come on, boys." McDowell leaped at Burke, his fist swinging. Burke ducked to the floor and McDowell sprawled over his back. Burke hit the next man in line with double uppercuts, his fists landing almost together. The man sagged in his tracks and Burke whirled like a cornered wolf.

McDowell had slammed against Swen's stalwart back. Burke grabbed an arm, twisted McDowell around and smashed a piledriving blow to the jaw. Then his arms were gripped by the men crowding behind.

Burke dropped to the floor, twisted, and felt the hands let go their grip. He caught a man's leg, tore it from the floor and rose with the leg in his grasp. Another leg flailed in his face and he grasped that. He lifted the man clear of the floor then crashed him down headfirst.

A show case splintered. A counter toppled. Men cursed and the uproar became furious. Burke found himself hampered on all sides, and a chair broke across his shoulders. His hand clutched a rung, jerked it free, and swung the weapon fiercely, feeling the wood strike bone and flesh. A man screamed in agony. Another voice panted: "Get a gun, get a gun!"

The chair cleared a space for Burke. Men were clawing at his feet. Swen's back bumped his and gave him comfort. The aisle before him was crowded with men—the burly working men of Rickman's Lode. Two had blood on their faces. Cat McDowell hauled himself upright by a radiator and stood shakily on his feet.

"Get the police," he said huskily. "They've killed Murphy."

Burke looked down. A man lay with his head against the radiator, and a smear of blood was spreading from his hair.

Suddenly Burke made a step and hurled the remains of the chair at the men in the aisle. He caught Cat McDowell by the throat; with his free hand he smote the big man across his leathern cheek, driving him back against the radiator, and turned to meet a fresh rush.

IT DIDN'T materialize. A tall, bareheaded young man in police khaki leaped on top of a table and shouted. "Stop! Stop! One more move and I'll gas you!"

It was Sergeant Swanson and he bore a short, big-muzzled riot gun in his hands. He shouted, "You'll get a sniff of this stuff and you'll be blind as bats."

Burke raised both hands, but he was watchful.

"All right, Swanson. This bunch rushed us."

"Get him," groaned Cat McDowell. "He killed Murphy."

"Stand still everybody," snapped Swanson, his eyes darting around. "All right. I know most of you. Ease back to the door there. Get back, I said."

Constable Charley Dicks had a long billy club in his hand. Another constable holstered his revolver. Burke heard a voice he knew, the voice of Stevens, whose word was law in Rickman's Lode.

"Take them to the lockup, Swanson. These men will be up later. Where's the doctor? Telephone for the doctor at once."

Burke looked behind him. Two-horse Swen winked broadly. "Well, I got me a couple of victims. Aw, there was only four of them at my end. I didn't really get warmed up."

One of Swen's victims rocked in a sitting position on the floor, holding one arm. The other lay on his face, motionless. Two more stood back, glaring, and of these one had a broken, bloody nose.

Burke picked up his packsack and stepped over the prone man against the radiator. He made his way to the front

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of the store, Swen at his heels, and everyone drew back from him. The entrance was packed and someone said: "Gangway for the doctor."

Burke stopped and looked long into the eyes of Mr. Stevens. The stocky, grizzled manager of the Amalgamated Company stared stonily back.

"That was dirty, Stevens," said Burke quietly.

"Yah," added Swen. "You're a mean guy, Mr. Stevens."

"Oh, come on," barked Sergeant Swanson impatiently, "and shut up."

CHAPTER III

ADDRESS: THE JAIL

"YAH," chuckled Swen as they entered the police office. "Here we are again, Burke. We've been in yail before, hey?"

Burke dropped his pack and surveyed his torn clothing ruefully. "Suit ruined, hat lost and I suppose someone grabbed my topcoat as a souvenir. Good clean fun. Well, Swanson, what's the verdict?"

"Answer that question yourself," the sergeant retorted testily. "You've laid yourselves wide open with this roughhouse stuff. I'll get some iodine for your hands. You don't seem to be cut up much otherwise."

Swanson disappeared through the door that led to his living quarters. Constable Dean, some years older than Swanson and not so tall, stood alertly by the street door.

Burke sighed. "We're in custody then?"

"I hope to tell you," Dean told them. "And you didn't help things by getting Stevens frothy with your bright remarks. That was a dumb touch, seeing he's the magistrate."

Swanson came back with hot water in a white basin, a first-aid kit, and a towel. "Better slap some disinfectant and gauze on those barked knuckles."

Burke looked as his bleeding right hand and his equally gory left. "H'm," he remarked reflectively. "I still hit about as hard with either hand. Guess I'm not exactly senile, yet."

They had taped the worst of their bruises when Charley Dicks arrived, bearing evil tidings.

"Well, gents," he announced gravely, "you sure as heck got your necks in a loop. Three men in the hospital and a couple of more who ought to be there. Your friend Cat McDowell is slaphappy and he thinks it's spring because he can hear the little birdies singing. But that guy Murphy is the worst. He's got concussion, the doc says, and he hasn't come to. Shucks, I thought that mick's head was harder than a cast-iron radiator."

No one spoke. Dicks continued gloomily: "Treloar has three ribs knocked loose and he can't use one arm. Murdock has a broken wrist, a split head and general shock. They say you tried to drive him through the floor headfirst."

"That's approximately correct," Burke agreed. "I suppose nobody mentioned the fact that we were attacked without provocation and that they tried their best to stamp us flat."

"Ah—" Dicks hesitated and looked at Sergeant Swanson. "They claim you hit McDowell and then Murphy. The other boys tried to pull you off. Wait!" Dicks held up his hands. "That's what they tell me. Anyhow, Stevens is taking the complaints and they are charging you with assault."

"Twenty-dollar fine," said Burke. "I guess we can manage that."

"Yeah?" Dicks drew down the corners of his mouth. "Not so fast, Burke, not so fast. That's one fine for common assault. But on a serious charge the maximum is one year in the jug. And the way Stevens feels right now I'll bet money that's what he'll tap you. Both of you."

"If Murphy dies, it's manslaughter," said Swanson abruptly. "You can't laugh that off, Burke."

"Law and justice in the wilds!" Burke's eyes were bitter. "You lads know we were ganged. You know damn well it was to get us arrested so that Stevens could railroad us. Where do you stand in this? What are you going to do about it?"

"What can we do?" demanded Swan-

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son unhappily. "Stevens is the head of the Company here, but nobody has ever found fault with any of his court decisions yet. He's fair and impartial. You know that, Burke. You don't like Stevens, but that's your fault. He doesn't want you back here and you know it. Why did you come back?"

"Why does any man," Burke threw back at him. "Why does any man come to this damned country? Wait, I'll tell you, Swanson."

BURKE hesitated. When he spoke again his anger was gone, so that his voice was wistful. "Twenty years ago," said Burke quietly, "I was running away from something, something in my mind. I got away from it in this bleak land of northern America. Alaska, the Canadian territories, I've roamed them all. Roamed them with a good man—old Two-horse Swen here."

Burke raised a finger. "Twenty years I've wandered and if I have a reputation—if Swen and I have reputations for being trail tough, for being able to take any weather that ever blew from the North Pole, by Heaven, we have earned them. Money—we never wanted money for itself. We wanted the fun of making it the hard way.

"We never thought much about money until we had that lucky break and made a sizable stake.

"But we weren't built for it. Swen blew his fast. I tried to go back; to pick up where I'd left off. But it was impossible. My money is gone. And so Swen and I are going to roye. Just now the trip we have in mind is the biggest thing on earth to us two.

"We are going in spite of three village policemen and Stevens himself. Don't finger your gun, Dean. If I want to, I'll take it away from you even though you have your finger on the trigger."

Dean grinned: "Try it."

A cold wind blew in as the door opened and Stevens came in. Swanson said hastily: "Order in the court." and pulled a chair to the desk. Dicks removed the white bowl and first-aid materials as Stevens sat down, took a sheaf of folded blue papers from his Mackinaw coat pocket.

"I have several informations here, and I will read the first." Stevens spoke in a flat, impersonal voice. "The information and complaint of Charles Allen Treat McDowell, who charges Two-Horse Swen and Handsled Burke with assault." He darted a glance at the two big men. "I won't hear the case now. I remand it for one week from today and I remand you in custody until that date."

"Order in the court," barked Swanson. "Court is adjourned." Stevens rose, took his cap and strode quickly to the door. Burke called sharply:

"Hold on a minute, Stevens. This is pretty raw. You can't—"

The closing of the door halted him. Burke started to follow, but Dean barred the way.

"No can do, mister." The constable's hand rested on his unbuttoned holster. "You're a prisoner." He waved his left hand to the two barred cages in the back of the room. "Can I show you to your apartment?"

THE cells were of sheet-iron, with steel-latticed tops and front; the electric light was close overhead. Swanson gave them what comfort he could.

"It's a lot better than wading around in the snow. Let down the swing bunks and take it easy. May be a little on the short side when you stretch out, but business is quiet so we give you a cell each.

Swen chuckled. "You ain't got a hacksaw or a can opener you don't want, hey? Man, you even got a tin floor on these things!"

"Give me my pack," said Burke. "We're far enough away from the stove to feel these cold walls. If I'm going to live in this country I might as well be dressed for it."

Swanson dumped Burke's pack out on the floor, went through it quickly, and handed the pack and contents in through the door. Then he slammed it shut and dropped the sliding hasp in place.

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Dicks brought his portable radio in later and set it on a chair so Burke could adjust the dial through the slats. Dicks was very proud of the radio.

"Isn't that a dandy! Carry music with you wherever you go. Man, I had a lot of fun with the Indians this summer. They couldn't figure it out. I could have sold a dozen of them. All the trading posts are starting to stock them."

"You ought to get a shortwave band on it so you can keep in touch with the office here," said Swen.

"Ha," said Dicks. "You're behind the times, Swen." He went over to a cupboard and returned with a small canvas packsack. "Here you are, the latest thing yet. Weighs twenty-eight pounds complete with an extra battery and it's got a two-way reception up to a hundred miles in average weather, and when conditions are right I bet you could send five hundred miles.

"Anyhow, you can receive almost any distance. Got earphones, of course, but it's mighty handy. Now I don't worry when I'm away from home about the family. I call the office here every night and find out how things are." He shoved the gray metal container back in the packsack. "But this little pickup set is my own and I use it for fun."

Swanson opened their cells at supper time.

"The wife is away," he explained, "and I'm cook, so you might as well come out in the kitchen and eat." At Burke's lifted eyebrow he explained. "She's gone Outside for a month or so. Her dad treated her and the baby to the return plane fare south." He led the way to his living quarters.

Burke and Swen eyed each other with grim humor. Constable Dean sat carelessly beside the kitchen stove and Charley Dicks was behind them. The police were disposed to be hospitable but they were carefully alert also.

WHEN they had eaten Burke tried again to draw out Swanson. But he found that young man both resentful and evasive.

"Now see here, Swanson," Burke said. "This stuff doesn't make sense. I'm not conceited enough to think the Amalgamated Company is worried about what I can do to them. I know damn well I don't amount to enough for them to do me—or Swen either—the honor of treating us as if we were somebody important. Now what's the answer? If you don't know, at least you must have some mighty good suspicions."

"I only know what I am permitted to know about the Company's business," retorted Swanson stiffly. "I'm friendly enough with Stevens and all his staff. But I don't pry into their business and they treat me the same way. They didn't object to Mrs. Dale going out with Jimmy Holm and François. She didn't say where she was going but nobody minded. In your case it's different, but I'm not going to ask why, even if I've got a hunch."

"We're being taken for a ride," insisted Burke. "Aren't we?"

"So you claim," said Swanson. "But this is a Company town and the Company runs it. If they want to make things unpleasant for you they have every chance to do it. So far I've heard your side only. We'll have to hear all the witnesses before—"

"Witnesses!" sneered Burke. "Company men. Don't be a fool, Swanson. You saw us fighting a mob. Fighting for our lives. Those men were trying to cripple us."

"So you say. When we got there you two were on top." Swanson stood up. "Hate to rush you, but—"

They went back to the office and into their cells. Burke said, "Well, Charley, I guess you're elected. You're a detective of the bush. You can read sign. Tell us what it means."

"You read sign pretty well yourself," Charley Dicks countered. "What's your idea?"

"I can't figure it out," said Burke. "I'm stumped."

Dean donned his pea jacket and went out. Dicks came closer to Burke's cell.

"You know the Company is always prospecting. Armitage—you remember the old lad was chief geologist—was in charge

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of the field crews. But he and Stevens didn't get along. So Armitage quit a few months ago and now he's with a comany in New York. Arctic Development Company. Adco, they call it. Got radium claims up by Great Bear Lake and looking for more.

"Now get this: The war has shot up the price of a lot of metals that it didn't pay to bother with before. Antimony and cinnibar and that sort of stuff. I've seen plenty of samples their field men brought in, but they never bothered to stake the claims. Weren't worth it, not up here.

"Now I hear talk about these metals being valuable enough to handle. Amalgamated is going to build a smelter and refining plant for something besides gold and silver. They can haul their ore by tractor trains in the winter or truck roads in the summer and it pays to ship the pure metal by plane.

"Anyhow, there is whispering all over the place and the field crews have been getting all set for a busy spring. Then the plane radioed yesterday that you were on board and Stevens like to had a fit, they say. He ordered the field crews out on the jump."

"Why?" Burke shook his head. "I don't get it."

"You had an airline ticket to Edmonton from New York?" queried Dicks softly.

"Yes, of course. But what—"

"Armitage has his office in New York. And he knows where all the Company prospects are. What would Stevens think? Handsled Burke and Two-horse Swen have been known to jump claims before. I mean, they got there first," amended Dicks.

BURKE slapped his thigh. "Well, what do you know! That's good! If that's all that's worrying Stevens we'll spike that idea. Get him on the phone and tell him I want to talk to him—as the Company manager. If he's got that bee in his bonnet I think I can—"

"Hey," said Swen sharply. "Don't you explain too good, Burke. Stevens would beat us to that place we want to go."

"I'll go easy," agreed Burke. "Go on, Charley—go get him."

"Calm yourself," yawned Charley Dicks. "Stevens doesn't come a-running for the likes of me or you either. I'll put it up to Swanson and see what he says."

Sergeant Swanson, preparing to get out for the evening, was not enthusiastic. He flatly refused to telephone to Stevens but agreed to bring Burke's desire for an interview to his attention.

"I don't see what good it's going to do in any case," he said. "You're remanded for eight days and if that man Murphy dies you're on the spot. I don't think Stevens has any intention of granting you bail. If Murphy gets better you might get bail—if you had a lawyer to take out a writ of habeas corpus. But there isn't a lawyer nearer than Edmonton or Fort Smith and that's a plane trip. You got money enough for that?"

"No," admitted Burke. "I haven't. But I'm sure that if Stevens will listen to me we can convince him that we're not working against his Company. Go on, Swanson, be a good fellow and bring him along. Or take me up to see him."

Swanson shook his head. "I won't take you up to his office, Burke, and that's that. But I'll try to persuade him to come and see you."

Swanson went out and Burke waited in a fever of impatience until midnight when Swanson came back with Constable Dean, who was to relieve Dicks. Swanson brought them some comfort.

"Murphy is conscious again and the doc says that probably he'll be all right in a few days. And Mr. Stevens will see you sometime tomorrow. He didn't say when, so you'll have to await his pleasure."

Burke yawned. "In that case I might as well go to sleep."

CHAPTER IV

THE MIGHT OF SWEN

CONSTABLE DICKS was away on patrol the next day and it was seven o'clock in the evening before Stevens came

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to the police office. He removed his thick reefer, laid his cap and mitts on the desk, stuck a cigar into his mouth and said: "Well, Burke, you want to see me?"

"Yes," said Burke quietly. "But I don't want to talk to you through the bars."

"Let them out," ordered Stevens as he sat down at the flat-topped desk and applied a match to his cigar. Swanson lifted the hasps on the two cell doors and the prisoners came out. Burke nodded toward Constable Dean. "I prefer as much privacy as possible."

Stevens nodded.

Swanson jerked his thumb toward his living quarters. "I guess you better wait out there," he said quietly to Dean. "I suppose it will be all right for me to hear this discussion—otherwise you talk from the cells."

"Of course." Burke grinned, knowing that Swanson would not leave them alone with Stevens. When Dean had left he came directly to the point.

"I've been puzzled, Stevens," he said quietly, "by your attitude since I landed here. Dicks has given me a clue. He says that you may think I'm employed by the Arctic Development Company—Armitage's company. Is that so?"

"Your reasoning," Stevens studied the tip of his cigar, "is cogent. Very cogent indeed."

"Ah," Burke almost whispered. "So it's like that, is it! I'm sorry to spoil your sport, Stevens, but you're barking up the wrong tree. I have no interest or connection with the Arctic Development or with your Mr. Armitage. I never knew where the man was or that there was such a company until Charley Dicks mentioned it last night."

"You came up here, by plane, direct from New York, to stake claims," Stevens told him coldly. "Will you deny that?"

"Of course I won't deny it," answered Burke. "Why should I? And what's so suspicious about that? What else would bring a man back to this frozen country? Certainly I came to stake claims.

"But no claims that the Amalgamated Company ever heard of or has any interest in. They are not within range of your field crews and do not touch on your interests or those of the Arctic Development Company. I can give you my word that we are not going to jump any of your claims or prospects. We don't even know where they are!"

"Armitage does," snapped Stevens. "Do you expect me to believe you? I gave you credit for more sense, Burke."

Swanson moved hastily so that he partly blocked Burke from the table. Swen shuffled uneasily a step closer to his partner.

"It's the truth," insisted Burke doggedly. "They call me a lot of things in this country but no one ever called me a liar yet—and proved it."

He was within arm's length of Stevens, his palms out protestingly. Swanson laid a restraining hand on Burke's shoulder and as his fingers tightened he recognized the error of using his right hand. Momentarily his unbuttoned holster flap was unguarded.

Stevens' lips twisted. "You're lying now."

BURKE'S two hands darted out and gripped Stevens' thick throat, cutting off his breath. The abruptly swift movement tore Swanson's fingers from Burke's shoulder, and before the policeman could do more than reach for his gun he was in the strangling grip of Two-horse Swen. Swen's huge left palm covered Swanson's mouth as Swen crushed the younger man to his thick chest. And Swen's quick right hand closed on the butt of the revolver.

"Easy! Easy, boy," whispered Swen in Swanson's ear. "Don't you make no noise. I got my hand on your gun and you can't pull my hand off. So you better stop trying. You make one noise now and it's too bad."

Burke's low tone was a growl. "If you want to live, Stevens . . . I'm not staying in any police cell at your say-so."

Stevens relaxed, slumping back in his chair. Burke said: "That's better." Stevens let his breath go in a gasp.

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Swen, striving to keep the furious Swanson from shouting, said. "Take his gun, Burke."

He was holding the revolver at arm's length and Swanson was clutching his wrist, although his face was still held in the vice of Swen's left hand. Swanson made bubbling sounds behind Swen's paws and his eyes were agonized.

Burke leaped like a cat, and as softly. He tore the revolver from Swen's grasp by the barrel and transferred the butt to his palm adroitly. He jerked his head toward the cells.

"Put him in. Clout him if he tries to yell. If Dean comes out here now he better come shooting."

Swanson still gurgled but Swen, with his right arm free, bent the tall policeman back over his knee. He said softly: "You better stop, young fella. My hand is too tough to bite a hole in. If you don't stop now I choke you and—"

Stevens said, more or less calmly, "Stop it, Swanson. They hold the cards. We're caught."

Swanson ceased struggling. Swen allowed him to straighten up and dropped his hand from Swanson's face. Burke's warning whisper was deadly:

"Don't shout. Don't shout unless you want to see gunsmoke. Get into those cells and get in quietly. I'm a liar, eh? I was fighting for my life yesterday. I'm doing it today. Get in that cell."

Swen reached out for the knob of the radio. Music came and he tuned it down. Stevens strode into the cell with his head up and his shoulders back, but Swanson groaned as he followed him. Swen shut the door as softly as he could and let the hasp slip into place.

"Hey Burke, we better—"

But Burke was already at the door to the living quarters. Swen turned the radio on full and the syncopated music drowned minor noises. Burke opened the door and went softly down the hall to the kitchen where Constable Dean, who had removed his rubbers and heavy socks, sat with his feet in the oven and a magazine in his hand. He turned as Burke pushed the door open casually.

"Solid comfort. I—"

Dean's voice dropped to an astounded whisper and the book fell from his hand. Burke snapped: "Hoist 'em, son, and—ah, would you!"

DEAN'S right hand was plucking at his holster as Burke leaped, holding the revolver clear. His knee struck the sitting constable's shoulder and knocked him sprawling on to the floor with one foot still in the oven. Burke snatched the weapon from Dean's holster.

Dean lay back, with his palms flat on the floor, glaring defiance.

"Get up," snapped Burke. "Get up and walk ahead of me into the office."

Dean withdrew his foot from the oven, slowly got to his feet and complied, his face dark with anger. As he stepped through the door, Two-horse Swen—who had been trying to flatten himself against the wall—grabbed him by the arms. Burke said: "All right Swen. I've got his gun."

Swen released his grip and said: "This way. We put you in that other cell. Wait. That radio is too loud now."

Swen turned it off. Dean stared at Swanson and Stevens behind the bars and turned from the open door of the adjoining cell. He said: "You can't do that. You—"

He leaped, his fists swinging. Swen ducked low and caught him by the legs at the knees. When he straightened, Dean toppled across his shoulders. Swen made a quick turn and began to pivot rapidly, once, twice . . .

"Stop clowning," growled Burke and grabbed Dean by the shoulders. Swen let go and Burke swung the policeman through the door of the second cell and banged it shut with a resounding clang.

"You work fast," observed Stevens, not without admiration. "Sometimes, Burke, I underestimate you."

"That so?" Burke stood close to the door grill. "Still think I'm a spotter for some of your opposition?"

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"I'm sure of it," answered Stevens. "And now, Burke, before you get yourself too far entangled in the net I'll make you a proposition."

"Shoot," Burke hesitated. "Call off your wolves and—"

"How much," Stevens asked quietly, "do you want to take the south plane to Edmonton, and points further?"

Burke rocked on his heels, his eyes cold and angry and puzzled. Two-horse Swen chuckled loudly:

"He don't believe us, Burke. He don't believe us. He thinks we are going to pull some funny stuff."

"We're wasting time." Burke opened Stevens' cell. "Hand me that packsack, will you please? Thanks." He closed the door. "I think I'll have to borrow your skis Swanson, and maybe a little grub, too. You won't mind, will you? We'd be tempted to take your dog team too if Dicks were back. By the way, we don't wish him any harm, but if he stays away a week it will be all right with us."

"You're not going to leave us locked up here?" demanded Swanson. "That fire will go out and—"

"You've got blankets and besides I should think someone would come looking for your cell mate before too long," Burke answered. "I don't have to tell you that it won't be healthy to crowd us from now on. If you want to talk to us peaceably just wave a white flag. Understand? That will mean that Stevens has admitted that this business was all a frame-up and that charges have been withdrawn.

"Maybe the authorities will relieve Mr. Stevens of his magistracy at the same time. It's some sort of a crime, isn't it—using a public position for private purposes?"

"You're an excellent sea lawyer," returned Stevens, "but a poor business man. Better sell out to us, Burke."

His tone worried Burke. It was confident. Too confident altogether for a man who was locked in a police cell with no immediate prospect of being released. Burke said so to Swen when, having taken Swanson's skis and ski poles from the woodshed, they ran through the darkness toward Swen's cabin.

"We'll have to travel and travel hard, Swen. That Stevens has something up his sleeve. He isn't worrying. Wonder if he has some of his field men handy. Maybe he has a guard on your cabin."

"That's yust too bad for them, then," said Swen mildly, "because we need a few things yet, Burke. Mitts and more socks and I want my own skis and my ax and my little tin cooking pails and a gun. Aw, I think Stevens is yust bluffing."

But Burke shook his head. It wasn't bluff.

CHAPTER V

BLEAK WORLD

HALF an hour later, with Rickman's Lode behind them, they were heading through the thin forest toward the loom of the mountains in the west. Swen chuckled as he clapped Burke on the back.

"Well, here we are again, partner. We got grub and we got a gun and an ax—everything we need. Give us a couple of hours start and nobody catches us, unless they got wings. Hey? Charley Dicks is the only man might catch us and he went down to McLean's. Maybe he'll stay all night and— Hey, Burke, we're on the trail of the Company men!"

The trail was indistinct in the darkness. Dog teams and men on snowshoes. Swen said: "We follow them a ways. We make better time."

"No," Burke decided. "That's just what the police will expect us to do. Let them follow our ski trail. It won't be packed so well."

They headed for the bulwark of mountains in the west, a long day's run away. They ran steadily, pausing only momentarily to ease their breath but not delaying to make a fire or to eat.

The waning morning moon hung above them and it was as light as a dark day when Swen said: "We eat when we cross this big swamp, Burke, where we got plenty of chance to watch the backtrack."

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To that plan Burke agreed. "I could do with a rest and a hot drink."

The swamp stretched for miles on either hand and it was a full mile across. They were within fifty yards of the dark spruce wall on the opposite side when a cold, drawling voice halted them.

"Easy, boys, easy. Just kind of put on the brakes and slide ahead slow so we can look you over. You can just dump them packs off your backs first."

Two-horse Swen said: "Yah, sure," and unslung the short carbine that hung, muzzle down, at his side. A spout of flame leaped from the trees, vivid orange against the somber background. The voice said, again:

"You drop that gun in the snow, if you know what's good for you. We got you covered and we'll tickle your hide with the next one. Drop them packs now, and the gun."

They complied silently. They were right in the open and at the mercy of their unseen captors. But it was the calm, drawling voice that warned them. They had no doubt that the unhurried owner of that voice would do precisely as he promised.

"Come ahead."

They advanced to within ten paces of the trees and could see two men. Burke said: "So we meet again. Your lads are great fighters—when the odds are all with you."

"You're not so bad yourself," returned the speaker, with no sign of emotion. "But you won't play horse with us again, gents. Just shake your feet out of them skis, and dangle back the way you come. You went out of your class, Burke, when you got funny with Stevens. He don't like being locked up in jail."

Burke wriggled his feet loose from the ski straps and walked forward. The voice suddenly grew brittle. "Stop."

They could see the gun muzzle. They could see two guns, in the hands of men who had fought them in the store at Rickman's Lode. Burke said through his teeth:

"Two more skunks! Leave a man on foot, without food, in this climate!"

"Skunks!" The speaker was a sturdy man, but lacking Burke's height. His silent companion stood slightly behind him. "Skunks! You're asking for it, mister. You'll do what we say or you'll get hurt. It don't make no difference which. You hear that, Burke?"

Swen's big hand drew Burke back.

"No, no, Burke. This guy is Silica Smith and we don't argue with him. Hey, we ain't eat yet, Silica. We eat and then we go back to Rickman's or any place you say, hey?"

"You go back to Rickman's if you want to eat," said Silica Smith, and there was grim amusement in his voice. "Yeah, I guess maybe I'll let you keep the skis. If you want to eat, you hit for Rickman's."

"Thanks," said Swen, swinging his partner half-around. "Come on, Burke. I bet I beat you to Rickman's. We don't fight no guys with guns. Not now, Burke. Don't you be no damn fool now. You come with me."

The harsh laugh of Silica Smith sped their retreat.

"RADIO," growled Burke. "We've been dumb, Swen. They expected us to follow them. Their sled track can't be so far off our trail. They spotted us in the open and laid for us. And it's a cinch the police are coming or they would have held us.

"Hope I meet Mr. Silica Smith sometime. We can eat at Rickman's, can we! Wonder where their camp is—with the rest of the gang. We'll see."

Five minutes later, Swen said: "You mean we ain't going back to Rickman's?"

Burke snorted impatiently. "Back to Rickman's! We started out to get to this Noname Lake and we're going. We'll circle this swamp through the timber when we get across this open. See, it's not more than four or five miles if we bear off south. Then we'll come on these bright boys when they aren't expecting us and . . . we'll eat, Swen. This was once we waited too long to eat."

"Ho!" Swen chortled. "I'm a careful

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fella. It got a two-pound hunk of cheese in my pocket. I guess we are good for another day's traveling."

"Cheese!" Burke held out his mitt. "Another day! We're good for a week more."

It was full daylight—wan winter daylight—when they reached the timber and swung to skirt the swamp. Shortly they struck a sled trail and Burke said: "That's the other three."

"Humph," Swen grunted. "You been away from the bush too long, Burke. One of them tracks is a woman. See, small and steps kind of short. I bet you that is this Mrs. Dale and them two Injuns she had guiding her. Say, Burke, what do you suppose a woman should be wandering around in the bush for in the winter time?"

"Who knows?" Burke shrugged. "Keep going. We've got traveling to do."

The brittle stars were blinking down when they struck the same track again. In the interval of daylight they had circled the swamp and the McKenzie Mountains were appreciably closer.

They stood and contemplated the sled trail—two weary and hungry men. Burke pointed to a gap in the mountain barrier ahead, a low spot in the serried rampart.

"That's the cut where the river comes out. And we need some stuff, Swen. Not much, but some."

"Yah." Swen nodded, and yawned. "By golly, Burke, I'm tired."

"I'll go ahead," decided Burke. "I'm not so bad. I mean, Im not as tired as I have been lots of times."

"We go," Swen said.

THE sled trail cut no other sign, and less than an hour later they saw the glow of a fire and dogs barked. They slid up to the fire, and greeted the surprised Mrs. Dale. Burke said, smiling: "Mind if we join you?"

Mrs. Dale, dumpy in thick Mackinaw pants and hooded parka, answered cheerfully: "You're just in time for supper."

"By golly, folks"—Two-horse Swen brandished a ski stick—"I'm glad to see you because I got a appetite. Hello, Mrs. Dale. Hello, you François. Hello, Jimmy Holm. I hope you are taking good care of this lady."

The Indian, François, grunted. The half-breed said: "Sure, but she doesn't know where she is—"

"Jimmy," instructed Mrs. Dale quickly. "Warm some more bread. I think this stew is enough for everybody."

That shut off whatever the half-breed had started to say.

They sat on either end of the back log and drank coffee while Jimmy Holm warmed frozen bread in a frying pan. Burke said: "Our equipment is back a piece. And by the way, have you seen anything of the Company dog teams that left Rickman's just after you did?"

"They might be over that way." Mrs. Dale pointed. "François said he could smell smoke last night." She met Burke's gaze and held it for a moment. "I don't suppose you have changed your mind about that matter we discussed in Rickman's?"

The question was pointed.

"No." Burke shook his head. "I'm sorry, too. But we are in a tearing hurry. We have to move on as soon as we eat."

When they had finished, they stood up and tightened their belts and Burke said: "We're obliged for the feed, Mrs. Dale. It was—"

She checked his thanks with a gesture, and then she held out an ax to him.

"You may need this. We have an extra one."

Burke stepped back, unwilling to take it. "No, we couldn't. You are very kind but—"

"Yah, an ax!" Swen stepped past Burke and grabbed it eagerly. "Man, oh man! It's yust what we want. Much obliged, lady. Don't you mind what this partner of mine says. He's kind of queer sometimes."

Burke shrugged and his hand went to the brim of his toque. "I hope you will have a successful"—he groped for a word—"trip."

Mrs. Dale's face was haggard, but she smiled. "I hope so."

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THEY struck off in the direction Mrs. Dale had indicated. As soon as they were out of sight of the camp, they separated, but they kept each other in sight through the timber. Presently Swen gave a low call, the cry of the Canada jay.

When Burke came over, Swen was standing on a sled track. He said: "I guess them birds ain't far. What do you think, Burke? We make a fire and have a sleep first, hey?"

"Might as well," agreed Burke. "Down one of these little draws should be safe. You make the fire and I'll scout ahead just to be sure their camp isn't too close."

For a mile Burke traveled, cautiously. He knew he should return to Swen, but he was anxious to reconnoiter the camp. He might even be able to eavesdrop and learn the men's plans for the next day. He saw the flicker of light in the timber and proceeded with even greater caution. When he noticed a snowshoe track in front of him he stopped dead. Someone had come out from the camp.

A voice laughed beside him in the darkness. A beam of light dazzled his eyes.

"Drop that ax, Burke. The dog's been growling for the last half-hour. So we waited. Ho, Silica!"

Burke held his ax hand up to shade his eyes. McDowell snarled. "I'll shoot fast if you try anything."

Burke let the ax drop. Another flashlight danced among the trees and outlined Burke. Silica Smith said angrily: "Tough guy, Burke, eh? Wouldn't go back!"

"Take off the skis, Burke," McDowell said. "You're a slippery guy. Where is that moose of a partner of yours? Huh, you won't answer, eh? Not that it makes any difference. You're the man we want."

Burke carried his skis to the fire. He felt a great weariness but his eyes were defiant and his thin smile contemptuous. Both Silica Smith and McDowell bristled at the smile. Burke did not act like a beaten man.

"Drop that foxy grin or I'll paste you one," McDowell growled.

"I imagine you would," said Burke softly. "But wouldn't it be safer to tie me up first? I don't think these four boys of yours are enough bodyguard. You're quite a big man, McDowell—with a gun in your hands or a crowd at your back."

McDowell backed a step or so away and his anger gave place to a grudging admiration. "Trying to get us sore enough to fight, eh? No you don't, Burke. No, you don't. You look sideways from now on and you stop a bullet. Like this."

He lifted the muzzle of his rifle slightly and fired a shot over Burke's head. Burke did not blink. McDowell reloaded.

"Watch him, boys, while I raise Rickman's."

The portable radio that McDowell used was the same type that Charley Dicks had produced in the police office. A compact affair in a small packsack.

McDowell had little trouble in raising Rickman's. The message he sent was terse. "Tell Stevens we've got Burke. Ask him if he wants us to shoot him here or bring him in."

McDowell grinned over his shoulder. "Expect that partner of yours to rescue you? He'll die quick if he tries it. You got enough charges against you now to keep you where the dogs won't bark at you for the next ten years."

A moment or two later McDowell spoke into the radio again.

"Okay. We'll bring him in."

BURKE sat or lay by the fire all night and dozed in little snatches. In the morning a youngish man called McRae said: "Here, tough guy. Toss a slug of coffee into you. I'd have shared my robe with you only—"

McDowell stopped him roughly.

"Feed Burke nothing. He's tough, he says. We'll see how tough. He can eat when he gets to Rickman's."

"Who is going to Rickman's?" asked Burke quietly.

McDowell glared at him suspiciously. "You've got something up your sleeve. Watch him, boys. And keep an eye peeled for that partner of his."

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"I'm not walking," Burke said coolly. "You can freight me on a sled."

"Tough guy!" McDowell snorted. "The stories they tell about you in this country must have been stretched pretty far. They claim you don't sleep nor eat nor stop when you start any place. Maybe you're getting old."

Silica Smith guffawed as Burke slowly got to his feet.

"So," he said coldly. "You think a man travels on his muscle, do you? I have done almost fifty miles on skis already and I can do fifty more. Let's go."

"Wait." McDowell relented somewhat. "Here, you better have a cup of coffee and a hunk of bannock first. I guess three of us can keep you headed in the right direction."

He cocked his eye at Silica Smith. "You watch out for this big bozo's partner. You and McRae. Likely he'll try to sneak some grub. Give him a lunch if he wants to hit back to Rickman's. He doesn't count much. We got the guy we want, this Burke here."

Burke followed the dog-team driver, Hardy. Behind him came McDowell and a man named Staples, both carrying rifles. For over an hour they traveled in silence. The dogs dragged the sled easily, following the trail made on the out trip, and the three men of the Amalgamated Company swung along on their webs. It was a rest for Burke, keeping the slow speed on his skis as he studied the terrain with an appraising eye, expectantly.

Two-horse Swen was loose somewhere in the timber.

THEY skirted the base of a rolling slope and Burke felt his muscles stiffen. This was a likely place if Swen were coming. Here he would have the advantage of speed on skis. Then Burke caught a glimpse of a flitting figure in the trees above them, and with a groan he fell flat on his face at Hardy's heels.

Hardy said: "Ho" to the dogs and turned. Burke was lying with his face in the snow and his arms outstretched. One foot was clear of the ski harness and the other only hung by a toe. Hardy grinned at McDowell.

"Not so tough. Played clean out. Shall we freight him, Cat?"

"Kick him in the ribs," snapped McDowell. "He's bluffing. That guy isn't played out. He's—"

McDowell's voice broke. As silently as a swooping owl, and no slower, had Two-horse Swen gathered momentum down the briefly timbered slope. He came from the shadow of a drooping spruce in a hissing smother of snow powder as he launched his charge.

McDowell swung up his rifle as Swen vaulted into the air in a hurtling turn that slammed both horizontal skis across McDowell's chest.

Burke came to life like an erupting volcano. As he rose to his knees, his right hand grasped Hardy's ankle and upset the man into the snow. Burke was whirling as his knees straightened, hands out, his lips grinning. Staples staggered, confused by the violence of Swen's charge. Burke grabbed him by the throat and his knee drove up into the pit of Staples' stomach. Staples grunted and doubled up.

Burke snatched the rifle from Staples' faltering grasp and jumped clear. Hardy was up and crouching to spring. Burke waved the muzzle at him.

"Whether I shoot you or just wrap this around your thick head," he said, panting a little, "won't make much difference to you."

Hardy froze in his crouch, bewilderment in his eyes. Two-horse Swen wheezed happily: "There, I got you, mister. I guess you better quit now or I'm liable to bust an arm or maybe a leg."

McDowell swore passionately. "Let go. Let go—"

Swen stood up, grinning. "I guess that kind of flattened you, hey? And I got your gun, too. Now, you boys don't get excited while me and Burke here sort of overhaul your commissary. We need some of this stuff and if you got any objections you might as well make them now." Swen

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chuckled. "And a lot of good it does you."

Again McDowell swore bitterly and at length. Swen winked at Burke. "The fella seems kind of peeved. You watch 'em now while I get busy. I guess they— Hey, Burke. Here's our packsacks they took."

Swen chuckled afresh as he cut the dogs loose. "Go on, you malemutes. You got a kennel at Rickman's." He swung an ax and in a few deft strokes reduced the sled to matchwood. "I'll yust trouble you for them snowshoes, gents. You boys will have to wade back through the snow to your camp. It ain't far and the exercise is good for you."

Three men kicked off their webs without comment. Swen chopped the frames across. Then he picked up the radio in its case.

"Here," McDowell said gruffly. "Don't bust that. You can take the batteries away but don't break up valuable machinery."

"Okay," agreed Swen. "But first you turn it on so we talk to this Rickman's Lode."

He stood clear while McDowell set the dial and shouted. "Hello, Rickman's. Hello, this is—"

Swen pushed him aside. "You stand over there where Burke can watch you. I'll talk. What are these—the earphones?" He slid back his parka hood and slipped them on over his wool cap. "Hello, that's Rickman's, huh? Hey, look! You know who this is talking? This is Two-horse Swen."

Swen laughed hugely.

"Yah. It's me all right. Me and Burke. You tell Stevens that he don't pick his men tough enough to handle us. You tell him we got some business over in the mountains and that we are too busy to yump any of his claims yust now and anyhow, we don't want any claims. Yah. So long, boys."

Swen tore the batteries out of the case. "We'll leave these a mile or so along if you want 'em again," he said. "Come on, Burke. I guess we got everything we need. Ax, matches, grub and guns. I don't like to pack two guns but I guess we better take 'em so these boys don't crowd us too close. Hey?"

The three Company men glared stonily as Swen and Burke swung up their packs, picked up their ski sticks and slid away out of sight. Hardy spat disgustedly.

"This is a hell of a note. But one thing— Them big bozos missed something. They didn't take no blankets, no sleeping robe. We better beat it with these robes before they come back."

"They won't come back." McDowell shook his head, almost enviously. "Those babies are tough. They don't need no blankets. They took a strip of canvas for a reflector and that's all they need."

He looked at his two accomplices.

"Round one, boys," he said, and set his jaw. "This is only half the story. If those birds can go to the mountains, so can we. Come on. We're still on the Company payroll. We won't be if we don't stop them, though," he amended.

CHAPTER VI

CALLING CIVILIZATION

BURKE drove eagerly forward, his fatigue forgotten, his mind's eye on their goal beyond the frowning mountain barrier. Swen ran behind, keeping the pace with mighty shoves of his ski poles.

It lacked an hour to midday when they struck Mrs. Dale's sled track, also headed for the mountains. The partners paused Swen squinted at the snow trail.

"I been thinking a lot about this woman, Burke. What is she after, anyhow? This is no place for a woman in the winter. This weather is getting thicker all the time. We can't see the peaks any more. Pretty soon it's going to be worse, with snow. She ought to be home."

"Who knows?" Burke shrugged. "Some bee in her bonnet. She's been out before. Maybe she's a writer getting material for a book. Maybe she's looking for some relative who has gone native. Come on. Keep moving, or we'll have this McDowell treading on our—"

Burke held up his hand. Came the faint sounds of travel; the clink and jingle of harness buckles; the *scree-scree* of sled

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runners on frozen snow. They waited until the dog team came to them through the timber with the guides running behind it.

The dogs stopped. François looked at them with stolid hostility and Jimmy Holm was plainly embarrassed. He said: "Hello."

"Where's Mrs. Dale?" demanded Burke. "Did you leave her in the bush?"

"Dat woman don't know nutting about where she go," explained François angrily. "Go this way. Go that way. Maybe go this way now. She crazy. Today she say we climb the big hill. Humph. We quit."

"She wants to go over the mountains and find a lake," said Jimmy Holm defensively, because the faces of Burke and Swen were menacing. "Nobody goes over them mountains in the winter, not even the Injuns. We wouldn't go. She kept some grub and her sleeping bag and said she would go on anyhow. We—we were going to tell the police at Rickman's."

"You quit, eh," whispered Swen grimly. "You quit!" His hand made a circular motion. "That was yust a mistake, Yimmy. You turn the team around now and we have a race, yah. You and François see if you can beat me and Burke back to where you left her. We will yust let the dogs pull our packs."

Jimmy Holm hesitated too long. Swen cuffed him across the face and knocked him flat. Burke caught François by the throat and lifted him clear of the snow, so that his snowshoes dangled. Jimmy struggled up and Swen cuffed him on the other cheek. This time he only went to his knees.

"Get up," said Swen gently, "and turn your dogs around. We have that race, yah."

Burke set the pop-eyed François on his feet, and waited. The Indian fought for breath and gasped frantically: "I go. I go."

"Mush," said Two-horse Swen. "Mush . . . ho!"

MRS. DALE was making a fire when they tracked her down. Burke reached her first, hefted the bulky pack she had carried and took the ax from her hands. He chopped kindling sticks from a dry standing balsam.

"You can't travel by yourself—in this country—in the winter."

She said, "Did you ever find that you simply had to go on?"

The dog team was coming up. Burke said:

"Yes. I know what you mean. Let's have a pot of tea. We persuaded your guides to return. Ah—I don't think they will leave you again."

The dog team stopped. The leader looked back over his shoulder and growled. His ears stood up.

"Somebody comes," stated Swen, "and we don't need two guesses who. Look, you François and you Jimmy. You take Mrs. Dale over them hills if she wants to go and if it is too much, why you yust keep going until she tells you to stop. If you don't do that, if you run away again"—Swen's voice was like the growl of a grizzly bear—"I yust take time to meet you and find out why. You hear me?"

The sullen Indian nodded, the halfbreed said: "Alright." Mrs. Dale was kneeling on a canvas bag by the fire. They could see the weary sag of her shoulders. She stood up quickly and blinked her eyes.

"Where are you going?" she hesitated. "You should rest."

"We're keeping ahead of somebody," explained Burke quietly. "And we are going through that gap ahead. It's getting hard to see but that's the road. Your guides can follow us if you like. The men who are chasing us may help break the trail, too." He touched his forehead. "Success!"

They swung up their packs, pushed with their ski poles and glided into the forest. For a time they proceeded silently until Swen stopped.

"I don't like this, Burke. We shouldn't leave that woman alone. Them guides are going to pull out again. She can't go over them hills. They know it but she don't. Hey, Burke. You and me couldn't tow a woman over them McKenzies?"

"Couldn't we?" countered Burke. "Are you sure about that?"

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"Aw, look, Burke. That woman was pretty near crying. I don't like to see a woman cry."

"They cry easily," said Burke. "It doesn't mean anything. Not like a man."

"That woman wouldn't cry easy," persisted Swen. "She's got the stuff anybody needs in this country. She was going to try to go on alone and she was still going to try it when we came up, but she couldn't make it. Say, Burke . . ."

Swen's usual amiable grin was gone, his eyes were cool and calculating as he met his partner's amused gaze. Burke leaned on his sticks, grinning.

"Go on, Swen," he said soothingly. "You're thinking. I've seen you think before and it worries me. It means trouble for somebody. Go on—what is it?"

"Where are you going?" demanded Swen with heat. "Yust where are we going? And what are we going to do when we get there? You tell me, Burke."

"Going!" Burke threw back his head and laughed with genuine amusement. "Didn't you know?" He chuckled again. "Why, Swen, we are going back to that nameless lake in the McKenzies where we just about located a placer claim. Placer platinum. That was the time you had the attack of appendicitis.

"I built a couple of fires and flagged a Company plane down and that flew us to Rickman's. If that plane hadn't been able to see our smoke, you wouldn't be here today and . . . But what of it?"

"Why didn't we come back and stake it in the summer time?" persisted Swen. Burke answered him patiently.

"Because we got in a gold rush and made a lot of money quick. You stayed up north and I went Outside. Now we're both broke and this prospect looks good. Now let's get going again."

"Aw, you lie." Swen's voice rose. "You lie, Burke. You don't give two tinker's cusses for no platinum that maybe ain't there. All you want to do is to raise some hell with the Company and get the best of that Stevens. Yah. Look, Burke, I ain't mad at the Company."

Burke's long breath swelled his chest tight. He relaxed with a gusty sigh, half of relief.

"Swen, you've turned gallant." He held his mittened hand out. "Shake, partner. I guess we're going back. I was a little worried about her myself."

Swen gripped Burke's palm and his grin came back—sheepish.

"Yah, sure, Burke. Some other time we find that placer."

SILICA SMITH was at the fire with the fifth man, McRae, when Burke and Swen glided up and wriggled their feet free of the ski straps. Burke and Swen dropped their ski poles but kept their rifles in the crooks of their left arms.

"Go easy," warned Smith. "Drop those guns." His muzzle covered Burke.

Burke stepped closer to him. They stood breast to breast and Burke's manner was menacing.

"So what," snapped Burke. "So what, little man? Do you want to call up Stevens and ask him what to do next?"

Smith's face flushed and he stepped back a pace. Burke laughed. "Why don't you shoot? Don't you know? You won't shoot because a jury at Fort Smith wouldn't be so sympathetic about you turning a man loose without grub or an ax at the end of a hard day."

Burke's hot eyes bore into Silica Smith's. His voice was like a lash. "Put down that gun!"

He swung on his heel toward the fire and the amazed Mrs. Dale.

"We've changed our plans," he told her bluntly. "Swen and I have decided that if you want to see what lies on the other side of the mountains, we will take you. When the rest of these Company men come up, we'll have an understanding."

She held her wrist to her lips. He could see hope leap into her eyes; see her shoulders straighten. But her voice was steady.

"I can't begin to thank you."

When McDowell and his two men finally trudged up, Burke and Swen were dozing back to back beside the fire. They came

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alert quickly, ready for the newcomers.

"Hi, you fellas. Made good time," Swen greeted them cheerfully. "I bet you don't find it so good walking without the snowshoes."

McDowell said, "What's this? How come you don't take their guns, Silica?" He set his radio pack down gently.

"Take them yourself." Smith's rifle, as well as that of McRae lay against their packed dogsled. McDowell strode over and picked up one of the weapons. He worked the mechanism to see if it was loaded and pointed the muzzle at Burke.

"Drop them guns."

Burke yawned. Swen said: "If you try any of that stuff, McDowell, you will be kind of sorry about it."

"You're prisoners," snarled McDowell. "Now I'm going to take both of you back to Rickman's."

"Where's your radio?" asked Burke. "Set it up and get me Rickman's. I want to talk to this man Stevens. Or I'll talk to the police."

"Better do it, Cat," Smith advised. "This gun stuff don't get you nowhere."

McDowell snorted. But he replaced the rifle and opened the radio pack, threw a loop of wire over the top branches of a small spruce and called: "Rickman's. Rickman's Lode. McDowell calling Rickman's Lode. Are you ready? Hello, hello. Are you ready?"

FLAKES of thin snow sifted down on them. Swen scanned the sky and commented, "Dirty weather coming. See them treetops shaking? We got a blizzard pretty near with us."

"It's here, you mean," corrected Burke. Where do you want to go, Mrs. Dale?"

Smith was watching them and his lip curled. "You better not make any plans, Burke. You aren't going anywhere except back with us."

McDowell was still at the radio, but the other four Company men stood close to the fire. The Indian François and Jimmy Holm were dragging up dry wood.

Mrs. Dale smiled wearily at Burke. "I'm afraid I'm a fool," she confessed sadly. "I thought I could—I'll tell you:

"I was Molly McLellan. Twenty years ago, when I was sixteen, Dad was the Hudson's Bay factor at McLellan's Point. It's closed now, of course.

"I married and went to the States. My husband died a year ago. I was left with some life insurance and three children. It's rather terrible to suddenly find yourself without anything to keep your girls in the schools they have learned to take as part of their lives, and to see a boy forced to give up his ambition to enter medical school."

She looked at them all, but her eyes stayed with Burke. "My children are bright, and my son is fifteen, the eldest. We have become used to a certain way of living, so different from all this, or the life I led when I was a girl at McLellan's Point on the McKenzie."

"Where is that nitwitted operator?" demanded McDowell hoarsely. "Rickman's Lode! Rickman's Lode! McDowell calling."

"I want to find a lake," said Mrs. Dale, and her voice rose. "I must find the lake. It is somewhere over the first ridge of the McKenzie Mountains, somewhere near here. It is a lake with three sides surrounded by high cliffs and a creek runs out of the other end. And there is a tributary creek that joins it almost at the lake. Look."

Mrs. Dale took a flat wallet from inside her parka, opened it and handed a picture to Burke. It was a page from a magazine, a full-page photo of a lake, rock rimmed on three sides and with one end choked with trees that grew to a shallow rocky beach. Around it were the tall bare peaks of the McKenzies.

"Can you take me there, Mr. Burke?"

THEIR heads were close together Burke's and Swen's and Smith's; and the other three Company men craned their necks.

"A pear-shaped lake," said Burke quietly. "A pear-shaped lake in the Mc-

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Kenzie mountains where there are perhaps ten thousand uncharted, unknown, unnamed lakes. Can we take her to this lake, Swen?"

"Yah, sure," boomed Two-horse Swen positively. "Yumping yiminy, Burke! That's our lake. That's the lake where—"

Burke's hard elbow stopped him. Swen gasped and clutched his stomach, and as he did so they heard McDowell saying:

"Can you get Mr. Stevens? Can you get Mr. Stevens? Can you—damn this switch!"

McDowell was listening intently. Burke strode over to him, the rifle still in his grasp. He tapped McDowell on the shoulder. "I'll talk to Stevens if you get him."

The Company men were in a compact knot. Smith was talking. Swen stood watching Mrs. Dale and his voice rose confidently again. "Don't you worry, lady. Me and that partner of mine can take you any place you want to go—from Aklavik to Sitka."

McDowell tore off the ear phones. "Here's Stevens. Put these on. When you hear his voice flip this two-way switch over. See?"

Burke donned the ear phones. Waited. Presently a voice he knew said: "Stevens speaking. Let me have your message."

Burke clicked the switch.

"Hello, Stevens," he said crisply. "Handsled Burke speaking. I'm in a camp at the foot of the McKenzie Mountains, about forty miles northwest of Rickman's. Your field crew is here with me, also Mrs. Dale and her guides. Swen and I each have a rifle that we took away from your men, and I would like to make you a promise, Stevens. Listen carefully:

"Swen and I are going on a trip with Mrs. Dale. It will take us two weeks. At the end of that time we will return to Rickman's and face any charge that you or the police may wish to lay against us. But in the meantime if your men interfere with us, there's going to be bloodshed. I'm not going to wait to hear your answer."

He took off the ear phones. McDowell grabbed them and said: "McDowell speaking. I'm listening." He snapped the two-way switch on the panel.

"Roll up your sleeping bag, Mrs. Dale," said Burke briskly. "That's all you need besides your snowshoes. We'll pack your bag. It's a go-light, siwash sort of a trip."

The Company men looked at him uncertainly. Burke grinned. "Want to start something, gents?"

"You aren't fooling anybody," snorted Silica Smith. "I know that picture. It was taken from one of the Company planes. You got no monopoly on that lake, Burke. I think we'll race you to it."

"Go ahead," said Burke calmly. "I suppose you know how to get there?"

"Sure." Smith was confident. "We'll follow you. Hey, that must be the lake Swen blows about when he has a few drinks. Noname Lake he calls it. Isn't that the place, Swen?"

Swen hesitated. Smith laughed. "You don't think fast enough to lie, you big hunk."

Mrs. Dale had folded her down robe preparatory to rolling it. Burke tossed a small leaden ball on the waterproof cover. "Did you ever see anything like that before—at your father's trading post on the McKenzie?"

Mrs. Dale picked up the little spheroid and held it to the light. Her voice was incredulous as she said:

"Yes, oh yes! It's the same. Like the musket ball my father traded with the skin-boat Indians who came from the mountains. Dad always said—"

Burke took it from her. "Time to go."

Mrs. Dale stuffed her robe into a light bag and Swen fastened it to his pack. He said: "Yimmy, I guess you and François can go back now. We see you at Rickman's."

Burke stood a few paces distant and the rifle was ready in his hands. Swen swung the pack to his wide back and clutched his own rifle in one hand, an ax in the other. "So long, boys."

McDowell and Smith had their heads together. McDowell said: "You'll see us sooner than that. Hey, Burke, Stevens says

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there is a radiogram for you at Rickman's. A mighty important one. He says you better not go too far away."

But the Company men made no move to interfere with the departure of Mrs. Dale and her two new guides.

CHAPTER VII

BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

THEY made camp when it was too dark to go further, in a dense clump of spruces. The wind had risen and the visibility for the past two hours had been limited so that Burke frequently consulted a compass pinned on his sleeve.

In a short order they had a brush windbreak, with boughs to sit on and a fire with green backlogs to throw the heat against the wall. Mrs. Dale watched them in wonder.

"I thought my Indians were good at making a camp. You two make them seem like children."

"Yah." Swen grinned. "We ain't bad, me and Burke. We had lots of practice. Now, lady, if you ain't too tired to watch the rice and bacon, we will get enough dry wood to last all night. We got to make the fire do instead of blankets."

Later, when they had eaten, Swen said: "You were kind of foolish, Burke, showing 'em that bullet. They will follow us close. And more behind them, hey? We'll have to keep them boys from following us too close. We can't let them get to that lake ahead of us. We start to climb tomorrow where that white water river comes down. That's where we traded the bullet from the Injun and he told us where he got it—or was it his father?"

"They won't follow us," said Burke. "You saw McDowell and Smith talking. They will radio Rickman's for a plane and the pilot who took that picture. If they can't get the same pilot, somebody in the Company will know the location of the lake. They will fly in there."

Swen lay back with a disgusted grunt. "Aw, we're sunk. Why didn't you say so before? Sure they'll use a plane. We might as well go back. Take us four or five days from here. One hour for a plane. Burke, you shouldn't of showed 'em that bullet."

"Don't get excited." Burke waved his hand at the sky. "A plane can't fly in this stuff. Not over these mountains. I was thinking of that, but I'll bet McDowell wasn't. A plane needs practically perfect weather. If these clouds keep hanging around the peaks, we've got every chance. About tomorrow or the next day they will think of that, but it will be too late to chase us."

TO MRS. DALE the ensuing five days were a nightmare; a heart-breaking struggle from the first signs of light until it was so dark that further progress was impossible.

She wore Swen's skis and he took her snowshoes until they began to climb through the frozen canyon of the river, where she resumed the webs. They followed the treacherous stream where they could, but there were patches of swift open water which could only be passed by laborious detours on the side hills.

At night Mrs. Dale crawled into her feather sleeping bag and felt wretchedly unhappy because the two men slept crouching beside the fire, and every time she awoke one or the other was replenishing the blaze. When she exclaimed that they never slept, they both laughed.

"We've got a reputation for being tough," explained Burke. "We get all the sleep we need. Don't worry about us. We've done this before. Often."

On the fifth day in the early afternoon, they broke through the last fringe of drooping balsams and found an open expanse of snow in front of them.

"Well, here we are," Burke said. "Here is your lake and there is no plane ahead of us. Couldn't be with the mists around. Now, shall we stake your placer claim or will you rest a while? You came to stake a placer claim, didn't you?"

Mrs. Dale slumped to the snow. She said weakly, "You don't mind if I cry, do you?"

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"That's all right, lady." Swen dumped his pack. "We had a tough trip but you done fine. Don't cry, because we got lots to do. We make a fire and while Burke and me stakes them claims, you cook something. We ain't got much grub left. Maybe tomorrow I get some fish through the ice or maybe one of them white bighorn sheep on the hillside."

. . . The next day was clear and the plane from Rickman's arrived one hour after dawn. Stevens stepped down first, followed by McDowell. Swen, Burke and Mrs. Dale walked out on the ice to meet them.

Stevens lifted his fur cap.

"I salute you, Mrs. Dale," he said. "I'm sorry we rather neglected you at Rickman's, but we were busy at the time. Besides I thought you were a newspaper writer who was after some unofficial angles." He held out an envelope.

"Radiogram for Major Burke Bethune. That's you, isn't it—Handsled Burke?"

"Thanks," Burke crumpled the envelope into his parka pocket. "Are you here as magistrate or boss of the Company, Stevens?"

Stevens shook his head. "You're a cool one. I know when I'm beat," he said, with a grin. "We were a bit jumpy, Burke. However, all our field men are out now and I think our prospects are pretty well in hand." He took a handful of cigars from his Mackinaw pocket. "Who'll have one?"

"You called me a spy and a liar," reminded Burke.

"That remark stands," Stevens said amiably. "I wouldn't trust you as far as I could throw you, Burke. Maybe—just maybe, mind you—I might be wrong. Maybe you really did intend to come to this lake. I guess we'll have to give it a name now. We'll map it as Burke's Lake."

"We've staked placer claims," said Burke. "The main creek and the feeder. All the ground." He took off his mitten. groped in his pants side pocket and brought out a small handful of leaden debris. He poured them into Stevens' mittened palm.

"Just to prove we found mineral in place, as the regulations say. You savvy mineral, Stevens. What is that stuff and what are the claims worth?"

"Platinum!" Stevens rolled the fragments on his palm. "Easy to work if you could scoop up this much by hand. Water isn't frozen, eh? Means we could start operations before the spring breakup. Umm! I don't know, Burke. I should think we could form a subsidiary company—fifty percent to you three and fifty to Amalgamated.

"Need planes to bring in machinery. Short season, too. But you know that. Give you a reasonable cash advance, of course, after our engineers have seen it."

Mrs. Dale gasped faintly and swayed until Burke steadied her.

"Take her to the plane," said Stevens. "No woman could stand that trip."

"She's thinking of her last few dollars that she gambled on this expedition, and she's thinking of her three kids," said Burke, as he helped her into the plane. "Do we get a free trip, Stevens? Back to jail?"

STEVENS spat out his cigar and bit the end off a fresh one. "Dammit," he said through his teeth, "open that telegram!"

Burke bared his hand to fish it out. "Likely you know what's in it." He tore the envelope open. The telegram read:

REPORT FORTHWITH TO ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE, OTTAWA.

Burke let the paper drop from his fingers. He put on his mitten again in a purely automatic gesture.

"Major Burke Bethune," he whispered. "Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross and Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross. Legion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre . . ." He hesitated, and looked at them almost shyly.

"That's enough for me. They said I was too old. I got overhauled by a clinic of experts in New York and sent their report up to Canada. That brought them to tune. Sent my recent flying log along too. Didn't tell you I took some instruction. Solo on the new machines costs

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money. I broke one or two up a bit, too. Yeah!"

Swen said, "So that's where your share of the money went!"

Burke grinned. "That's partly why I had to make another stake, but Mrs. Dale gets my share now. I'm off to a war again. I guess I've a fight or two in me yet."

Stevens said: "A fight! I'll say you—"

"Hey," broke in Two-horse Swen. "To hell with this prospecting. Mrs. Dale gets my share, too. I go with Burke. He needs a good guy to help him shoot and look after the engine, hey?"

"You're too old, Swen," protested Burke. "They won't take you."

"I'm forty-four and—"

Burke shook his head. "Not in the air force, Swen."

"Yah!" Two-horse Swen cast his mittens aside, tore open his parka, yanked the collar of his top shirt, groped at his throat and pulled. His hand came out with a length of gold chain and a small bronze Maltese cross. "Hey, Burke, you got a lot of ribbons. You ain't got one of these things."

He grinned sheepishly.

"Good Lord," said Burke, staring. "The Victoria Cross! You never told me you had that! What outfit were you with twenty years ago?"

"I go with you?" persisted Swen.

"With the V.C. you can join any outfit of fighting men anywhere in the world," said Burke. "Sure you can go with me. But why didn't you even mention—"

"Aw . . ." Swen looked foolish with embarrassment. "I was afraid of getting kidded, see? I was in one of the Scotch outfits that wore woman's clothes. Yah! Kilts, we called 'em."

THE END

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Wanted: A few desirable paying guests to make their home with temporary Sing Sing widow. Large sunny rooms; amazing fellow lodgers, and a fortune in bonds hidden somewhere about the house. Target practice daily in living room

ALL over New Rochelle worshipful young brides laid burnt offerings before their equally young husbands, grumbling servant girls dropped their morning quota of dishes, and frustrated Scotch gardeners decided what not to do during the day.

But Mrs. Florence Appleby slept. It was not until the last commuter had caught the last possible train, and the last young bride had crawled back into bed, that a faint wrinkling of the worthy matron's brow indicated that she might, after all, rise and face the new day.

Mrs. Appleby's brow was not one that wrinkled readily. Its present convolutions were caused by a vagrant ray of sunshine which smote her fairly in both eyes.

Having accomplished its purpose, the ray spread itself a bit and danced over a silver framed portrait of New York State Prisoner No. 57316 lately Ernest H. Appleby, of the brokerage firm of Appleby and Company, 102 Broadway, bonds.

Slowly Mrs. Appleby opened her right eye, then her left. Next she stretched, yawning with pleasurable comfort. Then, drawing on an unsuspected reservoir of strength, she braced both palms and hitched herself into a sitting position.

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This done, she permitted herself another yawn while her brain warmed up for the day's evils.

In rapid succession she recalled that she had five paying guests who were undoubtedly even now clamoring for breakfast, a vacant room and bath on which she was losing fifteen dollars a week, a romantic but still unmarried daughter, and that she was still, as the tabloids had so crassly put it, a Sing Sing widow.

"Oh, hell!" she sighed.

Recalling the advice dispensed the previous day by the Rev. Archibald Givens, D. D., the popular Vicar of the Airwaves, over Station WWWW, she resolutely dismissed from her mind the hungry guests, the vacant room, the unmarried daughter, her present social status, and the impulse to curse; and sought to concentrate on the other, the brighter side of life.

The Rev. Mr. Givens had recommended that his unseen flock, as a starter, look to their respective healths, roofs and iceboxes. Mrs. Appleby skipped these matters and assigned the time saved to contemplation of one hundred and ninety-eight emerald green and orange bonds, for each of which the Government of the United States was authorized, nay, enjoined by law, to pay the possessor One Thousand Dollars.

Mrs. Appleby could picture these bonds quite clearly, Originally there had been two hundred, and she was present when a detective retrieved the other two from Ernest Appleby's inside overcoat pocket.

Subsequently an ambitious Assistant District Attorney had alleged, and managed to convince twelve good men and true, that Ernest Appleby, alone of all men, knew the location of the remaining one hundred and ninety-eight.

Mrs. Appleby hoped it was true. While there had been some evidence that title to the bonds rested in the bank of which her best friend's husband, Herman Waring, was president, she felt that her husband, by going to jail, had established at least squatter's rights to them.

Then her mind wandered and again the cares of her *pension* descended on her like a bucket of cold water. She said, "Oh, hell," once more and got out of bed.

ON THE spacious lawn of Mon Plaisaunce—the suburbanese designation bestowed on the estate in happier days, when guests were not expected to slip a ten and a five, neatly folded, under their plates each Friday morning—the Hon. Hubert Pauncefote-Pye, of Bishop's Pye, Wedge-on-the-Sligh, Lincs., Eng., was doing his best to relieve Mrs. Appleby of one of her burdens, specifically, her daughter Alice.

From Mrs. Appleby's window, it appeared that the Hon. Hubert was making headway, and that lady went singing to her morning shower. Mrs. Appleby approved of the Hon. Hubert. He was a long, lean aristocrat who wore mismatched clothes as though he preferred them. Nor was he an idler.

He frequently reported for work at the New York branch of the Witham Galleries, to which his uncle, Lord Witham, had assigned him in the hope that at least one of the family would develop some business acumen.

And he was, Mrs. Appleby knew for a fact, the only visiting Englishman in Westchester County who had parted with more than a dollar in the past six months.

"I say," Hubert began, for the fourth time, while gripping Alice's hand lightly, "that is, will you . . . ah!" And for the fourth time his voice died away in a gurgle.

Alice looked up hopefully.

She had known what he was trying to say for the past twenty minutes, and was fervently wishing he would get it out, so she could gently turn him down and concentrate on the morning's shopping.

Not that Hubert didn't appeal to her. Hubert would appeal to any girl who had a secret fondness for Basil Rathbone. Under ordinary circumstances, or if her father had merely been hauled before a Congressional investigating committee, she would have helped Hubert out, accepted him on

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the spot, and immediately begun planning her bridesmaids' costumes. But she could not help feeling that one's old man lost caste in Sing Sing.

Hubert gulped five more times before deciding he was getting nowhere. Philosophically, he laid the matter on the table, so to speak, and released Alice's hand. With this decision, the red faded from his face and he found his voice.

"Think I'll pop into town," he said. "Have a look in at the shop. Rather expect a customer today for old Sir Egremont Pauncefote's portrait. And, confidentially, the family could use a bit of the ready. The war, you know."

Alice suddenly felt relieved. With a few words Hubert had restored their social equality.

While she never for a moment imagined any of the Pauncefote-Pyes were referred to by number instead of name, there was no getting away from the fact that at least two of the family, the ninth Earl and Hubert, were in trade.

"Yes, you'd better," she said. "After all, you have to make a living." Then, lest Hubert think she was rubbing it in, she added: "But I think it's wonderful of you. You're the first young Englishman I've ever met that I could respect."

"I say, do you?" Hubert blurted, startled. For a moment he toyed with the idea of resuming his attempts at proposing marriage, then his train of thought was abruptly sidetracked. "Look," he said, pointing to the wide, columned porch that masked the front of the house.

A very little man, also wearing mismatched coat and trousers, but without the *eclat* the tenth-in-line to the Earldom of Witham lent such attire, was scurrying up the broad steps. He carried no baggage and both Alice and Hubert noticed, even from a distance, that he punched the doorbell button with unnecessary vigor.

EMMA, the overworked staff of Mon Plaisaunce, took her time answering the door, despite imploring bellows from the living room.

"If you got a subpeony you can give it to me," she said, used to the routine. "If it's a bill, Missus Appleby'll mail you a check."

"I ain't a process server and I ain't a bill collector," the little man said indignantly. "I want to see Mrs. Appleby in person. I got a message for her from her husband."

Emma digested this, frowned thoughtfully, then transmitted the information to headquarters. "He say he's from Mr. Appleby," she bellowed.

"Send him in," floated back through the halls.

"She's in the living room," Emma told the visitor. "Go through that door and straight ahead. I ain't got time to show you."

Mrs. Appleby looked up from her desk, where she had been regretfully signing checks for the butcher, grocer, and plumber, and regarded the visitor curiously. "Yes?" she prompted, after the other had squirmed sufficiently to betray his plebeian origin.

"I'm an old friend of your husband's." The little man's face was clean, if somewhat unhealthily hued. And his blue eyes sparkled when they remained steady, which was not often.

He made a quick appraisal of his hostess. He saw a woman who was approaching forty without fear, who was ripened rather than preserved. A man of simple tastes himself, her plain hair-do and natural color pleased him.

It took the visitor little more than half a second to examine and approve Mrs. Appleby, but she was slower in coming to a decision. Ernest Appleby, she mused, certainly had acquired some peculiar friends; but then, in these days of falling social values, one probably had to make concessions. "You don't say," she remarked at last. "Business?"

"Well, we woiked together on the garbage detail for quite a while before Oinest got transferred to the license plant."

"Oh! You're a Public Enemy!" Mrs. Appleby's tone indicated that if it wasn't one horrid thing, it was another.

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"Well, I don't like to brag, but . . . "

"What do you want here?"

The little man got down to business immediately. "You see, it's this way. Oinest told me you was a right dame, see? So when I crushed outa the Big House last night, I headed for here to cool off."

Mrs. Appleby found it necessary to brace her elbows on the desk and prop up her head. She hadn't the slightest idea what "a right dame" signified, and doubted that her Ernest, even in jail, would ever employ such a phrase in referring to her. But it was painfully clear to her that she had an escaped convict on her hands.

"Oh dear," she said. "I should never have started taking paying guests. This is worse than having an actor in the house."

"Don't let *that* worry you," the little man said. "I'm heeled." He flashed a roll of bills. "I bumped into the warden on my way out. He'd just sold his memoirs." Then, as Mrs. Appleby maintained a glassy-eyed silence, he added, worriedly: "You ain't going to turn me down, are you? After all, Oinest and me was cellmates."

Alice, who had just sent Hubert to his room to put on morning coat and striped trousers, which was the uniform in which he manfully labored, chose that moment to enter the room. Mrs. Appleby instantly made up her mind. She could still recall, with painful vividness, the night four uncouth policemen had barged into the dining room during the fish course, manacled her Ernest before the Warings, of all people, and hauled him away to jail.

"Alice," she said "this is an old friend of your father's Mr. . . . what was the name?"

"Bates," the little man supplied. "Sam Bates. Pleased to meetcha." Alice nodded perfunctorily.

Not one to beat around the bush unnecessarily, Mrs. Appleby immediately went into detail. "Mr. Bates has just escaped from Sing Sing," she explained. "He is staying with us awhile."

"Oh!" Alice said, still not too cordial.

"I'm sure it's all right, Alice," Mrs. Appleby went on. "Mr. Bates is one of our better criminals. It isn't as if he were just a thug." But she sounded more hopeful than positive.

"But he's a murderer," Alice accused. "I read it in the morning paper." She snatched the journal in question from a side table and read aloud. "Slippery Sam Bates walked out of Sing Sing with warden's wallet. Wide manhunt on for escaped felon. Was serving life for double murder. That's you, isn't it?"

Mr. Bates shuffled and looked embarrassed, betraying a hitherto unsuspected sensitive side of his nature.

"Yeah," he admitted. "That's me. But those guys got what was coming to 'em. They rang in two extra aces on me in a poker game. I didn't want to mention that pinch," he continued, "because I'm a little ashamed of it. The cops grabbed me while I was taking a bath. Dragged me right out in front of a lot of reporters. I felt like a unique or something."

"See, dear," Mrs. Appleby said. "I told you it was perfectly all right. After all, your father knows Mr. Bates."

"Well." Alice was dubious.

"And get a nice cut of steak at the butcher's," Mrs. Appleby went on. "The Warings are coming for dinner, and I don't know where we'd be socially if Herman and Grace hadn't stood by us." Then, raising her voice, she called, "Emma."

Emma appeared so promptly as to leave no doubt that she had been at the keyhole.

As Mr. Bates started to follow Emma out of the room, Mrs. Appleby proved again that adversity will rouse the instinct of self-preservation in even the most delicately bred.

"By the way, Mr. Bates," she said, "the rent will be fifteen dollars a week."

"That's all right," Mr. Bates replied airily.

"In advance."

DINNER at Mon Plaisaunce was at six-thirty, and six-fifteen found the paying guests, with one exception, toeing the mark in the living room. Reading from left to right they were: Mrs. Minerva

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Williamson, Mr. Arnold Benson, Mrs. Oscar Twimbley and the Hon. Hubert.

Mrs. Williamson was a tall, striking brunette who lived on financial settlements from two husbands, and alimony from a third. Mr. Benson was an accountant who looked more like a retired bouncer. Mrs. Twimbley was short and stout, with a hooked nose honed to razor sharpness by sixty years of contact with other people's business. The Hon. Hubert was his usual self.

However diverse in appearance, they had one thing in common: hunger.

"There's a new guest," Mrs. Twimbley said, beginning her regular pre-dinner news broadcast. "He's a little man, reminds me of my poor Oscar just before he died. He's got the same sickly color Oscar had. His name is Smith and I understand he's interested in banks. He's got the room next to Mr. Armbruster. He's pretty strong, too, though you wouldn't think it to look at him. He carried Mr. Armbruster up the stairs this afternoon when Mr. Armbruster came in from fishing."

"I take it old Armbruster won't be dining with us tonight, then," Hubert put in.

"Ah yes he will. This Mr. Smith put him in the tub and turned the cold shower on him. Here he comes now."

Abner Armbruster, dean of the Mon Plaisaunce boarders, entered the room cautiously, using a step familiar with the treachery of seemingly solid terrafirma. Close behind him came Sam Bates, tastefully attired in a suit of leaf-green, emphasized by subdued yellow and purple stripes.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Williamson.

Mr. Bates leaped like a hooked tarpon and came down gulping. Five pairs of eyes were instantly fixed on him, but he returned the stare of only one, Mrs. Williamson's.

"Ulp!" he said, finally.

The other four pairs of eyes swung in unison to the first speaker. It was apparent that she had the floor.

"That . . . that *suit!*" she explained weakly.

"Quite," Hubert put in. He sounded deeply moved. "You and Armbruster must patronize the same tailor. I'm prepared to take my oath he has one just like it."

"Don't you feel it's a little, well, colorful?" Mrs. Twimbley inquired, not to be left out.

"Rather," Hubert went on. "Mark my words, Smith, if you insist on wearing that costume in public, chaps will come up to you in a steady stream asking what's good in the third race at Pimlico."

Mr. Armbruster had hitherto been restrained from joining in the conversation by a laudable desire to first bring both his eyes into focus simultaneously, that he might see what it was all about. He now spoke.

"S'funny. My suit was supposed to be an exclusive model."

"It should have been, legally," said Mrs. Twimbley. "Two of those is at least four too many." Mrs. Appleby entered the room, thus proroguing the discussion. She was followed by a stout, middle-aged man who bore a startling resemblance to a pouter pigeon up to the neck, and a complacent vulture from there on. A twittering matron, whose age had been pegged some years before at thirty, and whose figure also followed the pouter pigeon motif, brought up the rear.

"I want you all to meet Mr. and Mrs. Waring," Mrs. Appleby said, beaming. "Herman, Grace, this is Mrs. Williamson, and Mr. . . . "

"Good Lord!"

IT WAS the new arrival, Banker Waring, who now stood goggling. "Why, what on earth, Herman . . . ?" Mrs. Appleby began.

"What? Oh, yes." Banker Waring uttered a little laugh, the sort employed by a golfer caught picking up another's ball. His eyes swiveled around until they had encompassed the entire group. "It's just that *suit,*" he explained hastily. "It . . . it strikes one."

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Mr. Bates bridled and almost forgot he was the escaped felon for whom a wide manhunt was on. His first instinct was to rap sharply on Banker Waring's teeth with his knuckles. Not only was he fed up to the gills with comment on his attire, which was not strictly speaking his at all; but he knew Banker Waring had not been looking at him when that invocation interrupted the amenities, but at Mrs. Williamson.

Mrs. Appleby saved the day by loosing a short burst of tinkling laughter, and proceeding with the introductions. "You'll all have time to get acquainted," she said. "Dinner will be a little late. We're having something special."

"My fish?" asked Mr. Armbruster.

"No. Steak."

"What's wrong with my fish?" he demanded, after pondering a moment. He now distinctly recalled having measured and counted his day's catch while there was still a third of the bottle left, and finding it satisfactory. And unless he was suffering from hallucinations, he had consigned them to Emma with strict instructions on how to prepare them for dinner.

"They're lovely fish," Mrs. Appleby said, soothingly. "We're going to have them for lunch tomorrow."

"Harrumph!" It was Banker Waring again. "Could I have a little talk with you, Florence?"

. . . In the shadow of an arbor, overlooking Long Island Sound, Banker Waring paced up and down. His hands were clasped behind his back and his face, rendered indistinct by the merciful gloom, merely looked thoughtful. Mrs. Appleby occupied a comfortable lawn chair. Eventually the man pulled up in front of her, cleared his throat and pursed his lips.

"I've been thinking about Ernest."

Mrs. Appleby recognized her cue. "You were always so sympathetic, Herman."

"Ah, er, don't mention it. Don't mention it at all. Just occurred to me, you know, that is will be eight or nine years before Ernest is released."

"His lawyer told me he'd be out in three years, nine months and twenty-two days, with time off for good behavior."

"To be sure. I'd forgotten the possibility of parole. But even so, that's a long time, don't you think?"

Mrs. Appleby admitted that to one leading a shut-in's existence, it would probably seem long.

"But I'm thinking now of you," the banker went on. "And Alice. A fine young girl. What a pity she has to live under such a blight."

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Appleby interrupted, leaping to the defense of her absent spouse. "Some of our very best people are in jail. Ernest tells me he's met ever so many old friends."

Being a man of few words, and not wanting to waste them in a fruitless discussion of the growing snobbery of Sing Sing, Waring tried another track.

"How would you and Alice like to live in California until Ernest is out?" he asked, with the barest intimation that he might possibly arrange it.

Any woman who goes into the business of taking in paying guests soon learns to put her finger unerringly on the crux of any situation. Mrs. Appleby was no exception. "What would we use for money?" she asked.

"I was coming to that. Florence, I am prepared to buy this house."

"WHY, that's very nice of you, Herman," Mrs. Appleby said cautiously. She had a high opinion of Banker Waring as a social asset, but even a suckling babe had the common sense to avoid the man like the plague when it came to matters of business.

While he did not keep a leash on the few dollars he occasionally parted with, Banker Waring seemed to have the little things trained to race home at his whistle. His first dollar, which came to him when he was in the third grade, he had immediately put out at eight percent interest, and it was his proud boast that it hadn't had a day's rest since.

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But in this particular case, Mrs. Appleby was doing the banker an injustice. He was ready, if not willing, to pay in cash, right there and then, up to one third of what the place was actually worth.

As there must be an explanation for everything, there was, naturally, one for this unprecedented generosity. His wife had told him, as they dressed for dinner that night, that she wanted the Appleby house. "In my name," she had amplified.

After making his announcement, Banker Waring watched Mrs. Appleby closely for some indication that his offer would be rejected. But her perpetual, uncertain little smile, baffled, not to say maddened him. He couldn't figure out whether she was going to say yes or no, or even whether she had fully understood him. He began to perspire.

"I . . . I appreciate that, Herman," Mrs. Appleby said, at last. She seemed to have trouble choosing her words. "But I'm afraid I can't sell it to you."

"Oh, well," he said hurriedly. "It was just a thought on my part. Figured I might help you out, and all that."

"You see, Herman," Mrs. Appleby went on, "I've already sold Mon Plaisaunce. Or, rather, I've agreed to sell it. To a Mr. Shapiro."

"Shapiro?"

"Yes. Mr. Ignatz Shapiro. He and some of his friends want to turn it into a casino. He showed me the plans. They're going to have a restaurant, and dancing, and roulette and everything. Just like Monte Carlo. He said he'd give me a slice of it, too, whatever that means."

Banker Waring could not have been more horrified if he had suddenly found that his bank had loaned money to somebody who actually needed it.

"Shapiro!" he gasped. "Not Bad Boy Shapiro! You can't sell to him, Florence. It's . . . it's unthinkable."

"Why?"

"He's a Public Enemy. The man's a menace to the commmunity. Why, he spends half of his time in the police station."

Had this conversation taken place a few months earlier, Banker Waring would have scored with that one. But recent events, if they had not turned Mrs. Appleby's feet from the straight and narrow, had at least acclimated her to the more larcenous element. She felt a spiritual *entente* with the underworld.

"I don't see what difference that makes," she said, stoutly. "If the government is so anxious to get some of Mr. Sharpiro's money, the way the papers say, it is certainly good enough for me. By the way, Herman, how much were you thinking of paying me for the place?"

"Twenty thousand," the banker answered, automatically.

"Well," Mrs. Appleby said, complacently, "Mr. Shapiro is giving me sixty. All in cash, too. But I have to be getting back to my guests. Excuse me, Herman."

For a full five minutes after she left, Banker Waring sat on a bench, his head in his hands. At regular fifteen-second intervals deep groans welled from his capacious middle. Nor were they inspired altogether by what his wife, Grace, would say; although that would be plenty.

But eventually the man's pampered stomach put an end to this manifestation of despondency. The immediate future might be dark, his stomach told him, and it might even hold unspeakable horrors, but that was no justification for a hunger strike. With a final groan, he re-entered the house.

MEALS at Mon Plaisaunce, since the advent of the paying guests, had become rather grim affairs. Mrs. Appleby, like the Administration, was torn between a limited income and unlimited appetites. But, as she was a Republican, and therefore made of sterner stuff, it was the appetites that suffered in this case. The corollary, naturally, was that the paying guests shed the thin veneer of civilization at the dinner table and fought madly over the available food.

The necessity of fending for himself saved Banker Waring from having to

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answer immediately the questioning look in Mrs. Waring's eyes.

He raced through the soup course, finished well ahead of the field, and had already determined the balance of his fork when Emma elbowed the celery and olives out of the way and set down the steak platter. This foresight enabled him to spear the tenderloin before the Hon. Hubert, the runner-up, had advanced his weapon to striking position.

For the next fifteen minutes no sound broke the quiet but the steady champing of ten sets of teeth and the clinking of serving dishes being passed from hand to hand.

Then Mr. Benson, the accountant, introduced the topic for the evening's discussion. "I heard over the radio," he said, "that the police think this escaped convict is hiding around here somewhere."

Mr. Bates edged forward a little in his chair. "Yeah?"

"That's what the announcer said. There are three hundred armed men scouring the county for him. The warden says he expects the man, Bates is his name, Sam Bates, to be recaptured before morning."

Mrs. Appleby laid down her knife and fork and closed her eyes. Alice, carefully avoiding Mr. Bates' searching gaze, looked appealingly toward Hubert. Mrs. Williamson, who sat next to Mr. Bates, turned and regarded him with interest.

"Oh, well," Hubert said, blithely, "you ladies needn't worry. There are enough of us men here to protect you. Besides, I don't think the blighter will dare show up in town. More likely, he's cowering in a haymow on some farm."

"But," put in Mrs. Twimbley, "none of you are armed, and the radio said this man is dangerous. He's killed I don't know how many persons."

"Only two," Mr. Bates corrected.

"I've got the pater's old service pistol," Hubert said, reassuringly. "And there's a suit of armor in the hall that's simply dripping with lethal weapons."

"I'm still scared," Mrs. Twimbley said. "Would you care to sleep with a battle-axe tonight, Mr. Benson?" asked Hubert, proceeding with the defense dispositions.

Mr. Benson, who had returned to his cantaloupe and ice cream, looked up with sudden alarm.

"We are speaking of our defenses against this man Bates," Mrs. Twimbley said hurriedly.

"Oh," Mr. Benson said. "O.K."

"You keep that betsy handy?" Mr. Bates asked Hubert.

"Eh?"

"The rod. The old equalizer you was talking about."

Like most of his countrymen, Hubert had assiduously attended every American motion picture shown in England and was, therefore, conversant with the *patois* of Illinois' Cook County.

"Oh, absolutely," he answered. "Keep it right under my pillow. Chap can't be too careful in this country, you know."

Mrs. Appleby finally found her voice. "I'm sure we're all becoming alarmed about nothing," she said.

"QUITE so," Banker Waring put in. "But, since the man is in the neighborhood, I was wondering, Florence, if you couldn't put Grace up for the night. I have to drive up to Hartford. Business deal first thing in the morning, you know. And Grace would be alone at home."

Mrs. Waring's mouth fell open and she stared at her lord and master with astonishment.

"Why, of course," Mrs. Appleby said, happily. "She can have Alice's room and Alice can sleep with me."

"Now, what's all this about?" Mrs. Waring demanded with a dangerous inflection, when they were alone in a corner of the living room. "Don't tell me you fumbled buying the house."

"Yes, I didn't buy the house," Banker Waring hissed back. "And don't yell. I'll tell you all about it."

In a few whispered words he told his wife of the change in the situation.

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"Who's this Shapiro?" she wanted to know.

"Never mind who he is," Banker Waring snapped. "The thing to remember is that you're not going to get this house, so you'd better forget it right now and concentrate on what I'm telling you."

He leaned forward until his thin lips almost touched his wife's ear and began to talk. Five minutes later Mrs. Waring nodded. It was not an enthusiastic nod, but it signified assent, and Banker Waring was satisfied.

"But remember," she added, "I'm going with you."

"Of course, my dear, of course," he reassured her. "Now let's join the others."

During this conference, Alice and Hubert had slipped into the garden and the remaining members of the household had distributed themselves in two groups. Mr. Armbruster, again on the subject of his fish, held the bored attention of Mrs. Twimbley and Mr. Benson on a sofa near the radio. Mrs. Williamson had secured an easy chair next to Mr. Bates, in the far corner.

"Well, well, Sammy," she began, "fancy finding you here."

Mr. Bates, who was effacing himself behind a copy of the Collected works of Burns, did not answer. Mrs. Williamson noted that the volume was upside down and proceeded.

"Yep, Sammy, I'd given up all hope of of ever seeing you again."

"Cut it," Mr. Bates muttered.

"If it had only been five years, like Mr. Appleby got, I'd have waited for you," Mrs. Williamson went on. "But life is such a long time."

"Will you shut up?"

"You're after the bonds, of course," said Mrs. Williamson. "Well, you'll have a hard time finding them. I've practically torn the house apart, and so has Mrs. Appleby."

No man can utterly repress his professional instincts, and Mr. Bates rose to this. "You mean those bonds Oinest Appleby stole? Are they in this house? And the guy always told me he was innercent."

"He is," Mrs. Williamson said blandly. "As innocent as a newborn babe."

"Give," Mr. Bates said.

"I'll tell you later," Mrs. Williamson said. "Maybe. Here comes Mr. Waring."

Banker Waring sauntered over to the pair, made the expected remark about the weather, then favored Mrs. Williamson with a worried frown.

"I didn't know, Mrs. Williamson, that you lived here."

"No," she replied coolly. "When we met in that bar last month, you wanted to arrange for me to stay in a hotel—on a due bill you had."

"Not so loud, please," Banker Waring hissed, holding up one hand like a traffic policeman. "My wife, you know, might not understand."

"So," Mr. Bates said, when the banker had moved away. "So-ho."

"A girl's got to live," Mrs. Williamson rejoined, with spirit. "But let's go outside and let our hair down. It's been a long time since we had a talk together."

"Three years, four months and five days," said Mr. Bates, who had fallen into the habit of keeping track of such things.

LIKE all old houses, Mon Plaisaunce had its ghost, reputed to be that of the original tenant, who, following a dispute with his wife over a new hat, mode of 1874, placed a horse pistol to his head and blew out his brains.

Had a casual observer, therefore, been present in the Appleby living room during the early hours of the morning, he might have been forgiven if he had paled and clutched at the bridge lamp for support.

For he would have seen a shadowy form pass slowly through the front hall the music room, the living room, and the dining room, and disappear into thin air, leaving behind only the unmistakable aroma of rum, in which the unfortunate original tenant had been preserved pending an inquiry.

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But the first shadowy form was followed by three others, in rapid succession, thus blasting the ghost theory. Two of these figures, it is true, also vanished in the gloom, but the other, the second in order of appearance, crossed to the French windows, opened them and gave tongue.

"Hermannnn!"

"Shut up! Why don't you blow a bugle?"

Still another shadowy figure appeared, making five in all. This one posed a moment in the moonlight, while clambering through the window, and revealed a silhouette not unlike a bas relief of the hawk-headed Egyptian god Osiris, except that he was considerably thicker through the middle than any self-respecting deity should be.

"Don't talk to me like that, you oaf," said the figure who had opened the window.

"Shut up, and let's get about this business," hissed Banker Waring. "Do you want to wake up the whole house? Where did you put them?"

"I'll get them," Mrs. Waring said, dropping into a stage whisper. "I put them in a secret cupboard over the fireplace. You remember my family used to own this house. That's why I wanted you to buy it back. Ohhhh!"

"Now what?"

"I bumped into a chair. I'm going to turn on a light."

There was a click and Banker Waring blinked. He opened his mouth to swear, then common sense told him he'd better humor the woman. He contented himself by fuming, in which practice he was an adept.

"Here they are," Mrs. Waring announced proudly, handing him a thick bundle which crackled musically. Banker Waring seized the bundle and made cooing noises over it. "Now tell me how you got them in the first place."

"It was simple," her husband said modestly. "I took them to Appleby's office and got a receipt. Then we had a few drinks and when we left together I put them back in my briefcase. Nobody saw me, and I had Appleby's receipt. We were having dinner here, so we drove up together. I slipped two into Appleby's pocket, where the police couldn't miss them, and gave you these to hide. Fool that I was."

"As easy as that," Mrs. Waring marveled. For the first time in twenty years she gave her husband an admiring look.

"Of course," he hastily put in, "it required a certain amount of careful thought and some bold action, but then, all strokes of genius are based on that. Hey!"

He looked down at his hands and found them bereft, then glanced up angrily at his wife. She was staring over his shoulder.

"Careful thought, followed by bold action," said a musical voice behind him. "You've got something there, Hermie."

"She called you 'Hermie.'" Mrs. Waring's voice was accusing, and at any other time would have demanded some of that careful thought of which Banker Waring had spoken. Just now, however, he was straining his neck to locate the first speaker.

"Minerva!" he blurted.

"Yep," Mrs. Williamson admitted. She ruffled the heavy sheets that composed the packet. "This'll pay for those stockings you ripped."

"You can't get away with this," said Banker Waring, hissing again.

"Who is this woman and what is she to you?" demanded Mrs. Waring.

"Gimme those bonds," ordered the banker, still hissing.

"And what's this about ripped stockings?" Mrs. Waring wanted to know.

"No dice, Hermie," Mrs. Williamson replied coolly. She followed this up with words that would strike terror to any financier. "I know all. I was listening."

"Hello, folks."

BANKER WARING leaped six inches off the floor and Mrs. Williamson three and a half. Mrs. Waring, who was

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composing another query *in re* the ravished hose, remained immobile.

"Want some fish?"

All three turned to find Mr. Armbruster, a large, sizzling frying pan in his right hand, regarding them pleasantly. Even as they turned, a loud hiccup jerked the newcomer erect and a full pint of hot grease leaped out of the pan.

"No," said Banker Waring, speaking for all.

"O.K., O.K.," said Mr. Armbruster. "Just thought I'd ask." He retreated to the kitchen and the others relaxed.

"Now listen," Banker Waring resumed, "we can't stay here all night. My God, it's beginning to look like a convention. Those bonds, Min . . . er, Mrs. Williamson, will do you absolutely no good. You can't dispose of them. I can."

Mrs. Williamson's lovely face crinkled as she pondered this. Banker Waring saw that he had scored and followed up immediately. "No fence will give you more than ten percent of their value. I am willing to split eighty-twenty."

"Fifty-fifty," Mrs. Williamson offered.

"Seventy-thirty."

"Utsnay."

Footsteps sounded in the dining room. It was Mr. Armbruster returning, this time minus the frying pan. "The fish are on," he told them. "Sure you don't want some?"

Had those of his clients who frequently and publicly asserted that Banker Waring posssessed the soul and nervous system of a glutted octopus seen him at this moment, they would have instantly revised their estimate.

His face was red, his eyes popped and a strange whistling noise came from his open mouth. He looked like a loyal Notre Dame alumnus who had just paid $6.60 to see the Fighting Irish lose a Rose Bowl game.

For a long minute it was a toss-up whether he would give vent to a Tarzan yell and beat his breast, or fall to the floor, foaming at the mouth. As it happened, he did neither, as the fifth, and last shadowy form chose that moment to materialize from the drapes as Mr. Sam Bates, complete with revolver.

"I'll settle this argument," Mr. Bates announced. "Gimme those bonds, Minnie."

"But, Sammy . . ." Mrs. Williamson protested.

"Don't 'but, Sammy' me," Mr. Bates growled. "I heard you. Doublecrosser."

WITH a firm and determined step he advanced into the puddle of grease left by Mr. Armbruster on his first appearance and, like a male figure skater pursuing Sonja Henie in an ice ballet, slid across the room on one foot.

There was a horrible crash as he caromed off an overloaded end table, followed by the merry tinkling of glass from a crystal cabinet that was next in line. The whole was punctuated by a pistol shot.

"Now you've done it," Mrs. Williamson pointed out.

As if to confirm her observation, the entire second floor came awake.

Frightened feminine voices vied with bellowing male demands as to what it was all about. Then came the muffled padding of bare feet on the stairs and the Hon. Hubert, brandishing a two-handed sword, appeared. Close on his heels came Mr. Benson, flourishing the battle-axe mentioned earlier. Over their shoulders peered the faces of Mrs. Appleby, Alice, Mrs. Twimbley and Emma. It remained for Hubert to voice the question in all their minds.

"I say, dash it," he asked, "what *is* all this?"

He whirled the sword tenatively around his head and nearly decapitated Mr. Bates, who was crawling out of the wreckage of the cabinet.

"Hey!" protested Mr. Bates. "Be careful." He eyed the frightful weapon, then asked: "What are you doing with that thing, anyway?"

"Some bounder pinched my revolver," Hubert explained.

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He glanced around the room and his eye fell on the firearm in question, lying on the floor where Mr. Bates had dropped it. "Oh, there it is," he said. He leaned forward to pick it up and received a nasty crack on the head from the bony skull of Banker Waring, who had the same idea.

"Hands up!" roared Banker Waring. He retreated a few steps until he stood in the doorway to the dining room. He waved the revolver from side to side and lined up the others opposite him. "Hands up, dammit!"

"Herman Waring," demanded Mrs. Appleby. "You put down that gun. It might go off again."

"I'm not fooling," he declaimed. "I've been through enough tonight."

"I really believe the fellow is serious," said Hubert, noticing that Banker Waring's face was even redder and he was beginning to pant with measured rhythm.

"Minerva," the man went on, "hand over those bonds. I'm going, *alone*."

"Herman!" It was Mrs. Waring. "You promised to take me. You promised if I told you where I hid those bonds you'd take me."

"You heel," commented Mrs. Williamson.

It remained for Alice, who was following closely the transaction between Mrs. Williamson and Banker Waring, to illuminate the proceedings for the benefit of the late arrivals. "Why," she cried, "those are the bonds the police said Daddy stole."

There followed several seconds of pregnant silence, broken only by a peculiar whuffing sound. It was Emma, sniffing. "Something's burning in the kitchen," she stated, authoritatively.

"My fish!" Mr. Armbruster, who had been reduced to silence by the untoward events that followed his well-meant invitation, suddenly came to life.

HE DARTED through the doorway and sped to the kitchen, leaving scattered in his wake one banker, one revolver and one hundred and ninety-eight beautifully engraved emerald and orange bonds of the United States of America.

Then, lest there still be one resident of the neighborhood asleep, a squad car of the New Rochelle Police Department pulled up outside with a screaming siren, wailing brakes and the teeth-gritting crunch of gravel.

"Here," Mr. Bates said, handing to Hubert the revolver which he had retrieved. He whispered in the other's ear.

"Well, if you've got to go, I suppose you've got to go," Hubert conceded, taking the weapon.

Mr. Bates vanished through the dining room door just as three large policemen entered from the hall.

"Here," demanded the first policeman. "What's the trouble?"

As mistress of Mon Plaisaunce, Mrs. Appleby felt it incumbent on her to make some sort of explanation.

"Here are the bonds you people accused Mr. Appleby of stealing," she said, shoving them at the man. "There was a terrible rumpus and shooting and everything going on down here and we came down and found Mr. Waring, here, and Mrs. Waring and Mrs. Williamson and Mr. Armbruster and Mr. er, Smith and these bonds. Then Mr. Waring grabbed a gun and the bonds and said he was going away alone and Grace, that's Mrs. Waring, said no, he couldn't go alone because he had promised to take her. Then . . . "

"Hold it," interrupted the policeman. He looked around appealingly. "Can't any of you tell me what it's all about?"

"Sure, copper," said Mrs. Williamson. She was lolling in the biggest of the easy chairs, smoking a cigarette in a long holder. Mr. Bates, had he remained, would have been proud of the *savoir faire* she exhibited, despite his recent harsh words.

"I heard the Waring dame go downstairs and tailed her. She let her fat husband in through the window and gave him the loot. I heard him say he'd stolen the bonds and framed old Appleby. She hid

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them for him in a secret cupboard over the fireplace. You'll have to get her to show it to you!

"You . . . you hussy!" wailed Mrs. Waring, finally recalling the word she had been seeking for the past ten minutes.

"I know it's tough, Gracie," Mrs. Williamson consoled her. "But I have to look after my own skin. Anyway, you're not losing much."

"Now will you let my Ernest out of Sing Sing?" demanded Mrs. Appleby.

"Oh, sure. He'll be turned loose," the policeman assured her. "With this dame's story, if it's true, he's practically out now."

Banker Waring, who had changed hands during this conversation and was now in the grip of the second and third policemen, finally managed to get in a word. "I demand a lawyer," he said.

"He's guilty, all right," said the second policeman.

"Yeah," agreed the third. "That clinches it."

They glared at Banker Waring and proceeded to remove him.

Fifteen minutes later, only Hubert and Alice were left amid the wreckage.

"So that's all that stood between us?" he murmured.

"Yes," Alice said, staring fixedly at the floor.

"Why didn't you tell me, darling?" Hubert's voice was reproachful. "Why, my uncle, Sir Osbert Pauncefote, has been languishing in gaol for three years, and he'll probably never get out. He owes too much back alimony."

"Oh, Hubert!"

"Alice!"

There was a sharp "hic" behind them. They broke hastily and faced a smiling Mr. Armbruster. "Like some fried fish?" he asked. "They weren't burnt hardly at all."

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The old captain waggled his finger under the Britisher's nose—it was useless

Destination Unknown

By RICHARD SALE

TO GABRIEL ADAMS, mild-mannered young scientist, there is something decidedly wrong about the S.S. *Apeldoorn*, the Dutch freighter on which he has made seven previous trips to Rio. This trip, for instance, both the radio man and the chief officer are missing, victims of the sort of injuries that, to Adams, suggest that they have been beaten up. And Adams is the only passenger aboard, which is more than odd. Adding that to the two men who have replaced the missing officers—sour-faced THIMM and taciturn STEUBER—Gabe has a puzzle that isn't to his liking.

Gabe has to leave the ship at Willemstad to collect a specimen for the Federal Museum—a fish of a species thought to have been extinct for fifty million years. Waiting at Port of Spain to rejoin the *Apeldoorn*, Gabe meets one LETTI GAYNOR, who tells him not one but several different lies to explain why she wants him to change from the *Apeldoorn* to her cruise-ship for the completion of his trip to Rio.

MISS GAYNOR goes so far as an attempt to blackmail Gabe by coming to his room at night very sketchily clad. This try is blocked by lovely MERRILL LEEDS, who comes sauntering into the room and gets rid of Letti in no time at all.

Merrill tells Gabe that if he sails on board the *Apeldoorn*, her father, who is the Lloyds' man at Port of Spain, will insure neither him nor his precious *ganoid isophilis*. Gabriel takes this to mean that she has definite knowledge that something is due to go very wrong aboard the *Apeldoorn*. He demands to know from whom she has this information. She has done no more

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than to tell him the name: SECOND-OFFICER CUMSTOCK, when Gabriel gets the word from his crony VAN DER DECKEN, steward on the *Apeldoorn*, that Cumstock has been found hanged in his stateroom.

The port authorities call it suicide, but van der Decken astutely points out that few men will attempt to kill themselves by hanging from a position in which their feet can touch the floor.

Merrill's father has been aboard the *Apeldoorn*, but Gabe can find no one who has seen him within the past two hours.

In spite of all the overt violence and undercover mystery, Gabe finds a strange feeling of peace within him as he settles down on the *Apeldoorn*. "Everything," he muses, "seems so calm here. I only hope it lasts. . . ."

CHAPTER X

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM

ALL things considered, Gabriel Adams slept soundly, and he was annoyed with himself that he had. Sentries on watch, he felt, should do no more than drowse lightly. He had been restless enough in his bed at the Queen's Park Inn, but in his berth aboard ship, he had popped off instantly.

When he awoke, not long after dawn, he felt refreshed, his head clear. His cabin was on the ship's portside facing the harbor, and he looked across the gulf at the buildings which were beginning to evolve out of the gray mist.

The sun was still invisible, hidden behind the dark mountains behind Port of Spain, but the backlighting made a splendid effect. The gulf water looked pale green in the dawn-light; and the day smelled fresh and salty.

Suddenly Gabe came in possession of a fact that had lurked half concealed in his brain since the moment he had opened his eyes: he had not awakened naturally. Something had roused him. This was confirmed by a tapping on his door the next instant. He climbed out of his berth and unlocked the door.

"Good morning, *mijnheer*," van der Decken said cheerfully. "Will you have coffee?"

"Don't you sleep at all?" Gabriel said.

Van der Decken said, "I have news, but first I bring you coffee." His pleasant, cheerful face carried no reflection of the ugly fact that violence and death had come aboard last night.

"All right," Gabe said, frowning.

The steward was back in five minutes with a tray. Steaming coffee in a white china pot. Fruit that looked scrubbed and dewy.

Gabriel closed the door. "What's the news?"

"We have six passengers," van der Decken whispered. "They boarded ten minutes ago. Five men and a woman. Passage for Rio. All of them. They missed the boat in New York and flew down to catch it." Judging by the steward's manner, this happened all the time.

"Who are they?" Gabriel snorted. "That's preposterous."

"I checked their names on the list. They're German."

"What about Leeds?"

The steward's blandness relaxed into a slight frown. "He left the ship sometime last night," said van der Decken. "I got that from the captain himself." The frown deepened. "There *is* something strange about all this, Gabriel. Captain Klinkert is cross as a *tijger* and he takes a man's head off when he is spoken to. He is worried. I am worried too. You were right. All of this is strange."

"When do we sail?"

"At eight we weigh anchor."

"It's a fact that all cabins are paid for? No one else could take passage, even with empty rooms?"

"*Ja*." He shrugged. "*Ik versta het niet*."

"You're not alone there. I don't understand it either." Gabriel sipped his coffee and lighted a cigarette. "Sometimes I wonder why I bother my pretty head about any of it. I don't see how it concerns me at all. But I seem to get pulled in to things by the heels. It's a nuisance. I don't like it.

"Some one is playing for keeps. I'd hate to commit suicide with my feet on the ground. The way poor Cumstock did.

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That would be annoying. Also, I'd hate to have a boat sink under my feet. That would be uncomfortable."

"Whatever it's all about, you're wrong on that, *mijnheer*. This boat won't sink. She's a fine boat."

"Cumstock was a fine man," Gabriel said laconically. "Somebody opened his sea cocks just the same. If I were smart, I'd stay in Port of Spain for two weeks and then fly to Rio."

Van der Decken looked amused. "*Neen*, you don't leave the ship. You have Dutch blood, *mijnheer*, with your stubborn jaw."

"God save the mark," Gabriel groaned. "That's all we would need now—a philosophical steward. You'd better get out of here."

"*Ja*. I will see you on deck later."

GABRIEL returned to his bed and finished his coffee as the sun, crawling over the distant mountains, burned the cabin orange.

The thought occurred to him that if Clements Leeds had held the answer to Cumstock's death in the letter from Dominica, wouldn't the insurance-agent have made use of his information, the previous night, when he visited the ship with the authorities?

If there had really been foul play with the defunct second-officer, would Leeds have departed so gracefully and quietly? Gabriel wondered if he weren't making an ass of himself with his suspicions.

On the other hand, he could not persuade himself that the missing Deechen and the missing Drakensberg had suffered merely casual accidents which prevented their sailing with the ship from New York.

He had joked with van der Decken about it in Wilhelmstad but it was no longer a joking matter. It made good sense. If you were going to sink a ship, the two important posts to cover would be those of chief officer and radio officer. The former could assume control of the ship the instant anything happened to the captain, and the latter could prevent any radio messages, which might be allergic to the general scheme, from being transmitted.

Gabriel shaved and dressed, donning his most violent sport-jacket in an attempt to halt the fidgetings of his stream of consciousness. The green and brown pattern of the jacket required in its wearer the bland *sangfroid* of a complete extrovert.

He ate breakfast in the dining room, aft, where it was located above the ship's rudder and screw. He did not eat alone, either, for two of the new passengers were sharing a table.

He examined them in a falsely perfunctory manner; actually he eyed them quite sharply. They were both young, neither over twenty-five; one brown-haired, one blond; both big. They glanced at him occasionally and he could sense that they were uneasy. They talked in low voices in German, sometimes mixed with Spanish. They said nothing of consequence in Spanish. Gabe couldn't tell what they were saying in German.

At seven-thirty, Gabriel heard a commotion on the upper deck, and went up to investigate.

He found a company of British Marines in a big launch at the boarding ladder, and the commanding officer coming up. The Marines carried rifles with fixed bayonets which picked up fire from the violent morning sun.

Captain Klinkert had seen them from the bridge and was on his way down while the chief-officer, Steuber, shook hands with the Marine captain, and welcomed him aboard.

Gabriel had not previously had the opportunity to observe the chief-officer closely. He had caught only one glimpse of Steuber when the *Apeldoorn* was threading her route through the Bahamas southward, and he had not seen the mate again. Steuber was of medium height; he was very wiry, with a white scar making a ragged cleft in his chin. He said to the Marine commander: "May I help you, sir?"

"I'm Captain Lainsley," the Marine commander said. "Are you the first offi-

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cer? I wish to see Captain Klinkert at once."

"I will get him, sir," Steuber said smartly, touching his cap. He went down the deck.

Gabriel sauntered over to Captain Lainsley and said hello and casually asked what was the matter. The commander smiled pleasantly but coldly and did things with heavy red eyebrows which indicated plainly that Gabriel should mind his own business. The point was well taken and Gabe asked no more questions. His status as an amiable snooper had clearly defined limits.

Steuber did not go far, for Captain Klinkert was already on the way, and Gabriel could see that Klinkert's ordinarily merry face was red and lined and angry.

HE TOOK short quick steps, swinging his arms in a long arc and he halted before Lainsley, panting a little and swelling up like a blowfish to demand, *Ja, Majnheer Kapitein, wat is er?"*

"English, please," Captain Lainsley said sharply. "I am going to search your ship, Captain, with your permission."

"Neen," said Captain Klinkert, barking like a seal. "You do not have my permission. Port authorities were all over this ship like rats last night. I clear at eight bells and I will not be detained. This is a neutral ship, *Kapitein,* not the vessel of a belligerent."

"I must insist," said the Englishman, unimpressed.

"For what cause? I carry mails for neutral countries in South America. There is no mail aboard for any belligerent. That has all been checked by your customs here."

"I wish to examine your passengers, Captain Klinkert, and I'll appreciate your co-operation. I am in possession of information which leads me to believe you have German seamen aboard."

"That is not true."

Lainsley continued coolly:

"Two of them, Steinmetz and Groner are traveling with forged passports. They came from Bahia. We have checked, and Bahia has no record of their visas."

"I refuse, *Kapitein,"* said Captain Klinkert. "It is my right to protest your detaining my ship. I will resist."

Captain Lainsley blew a whistle, and the armed Marines boarded the *Apeldoorn* with bayonets fixed. There was no resistance. Captain Klinkert nodded brusquely and remarked that the situation was beyond him.

Gabriel could see that his objections had been just a formality, calculated as basis for a subsequent official protest from the Dutch.

The Marines disappeared below decks under the guidance of Mr. Steuber whom Klinkert assigned to them, and the affair was ended.

Captain Klinkert returned to the bridge, still angry, and did not even favor Gabriel with a reply when Gabriel said good morning to him.

At the railing, Gabriel watched a small launch coming out to the *Apeldoorn* across the waters of the gulf. As he watched, he felt some one join him, and saw it was the steward.

"The captain is angry," van der Decken said.

"Well, after all, there's a war on," Gabriel said. "They have to do what they think best."

"Ja, but Captain Klinkert has had enough trouble."

Gabriel nodded. "Is that launch coming here?"

Van der Decken looked across the waters. "I guess so, *mijnheer.* There is no other ship out on these roads, except the big Grace liner, and you can see her to the north. Maybe this is more trouble, *ja?"* Having permitted himself to admit that something queer was going on, the steward eagerly awaited developments. He peered happily across the gulf.

But the launch was still far enough away so that they could not see who was aboard, even though they could make out that there were only two figures in the small boat.

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THE Marines and Captain Lainsley reappeared on deck with two young men in tow. Captain Klinkert came thudding up again, and broke into a heated argument with Lainsley. Gabe was too far away to make out what they said, but it was plain that the Dutchman eventually went down in defeat, his flags of protest still flying.

Then the Marines deserted the *Apeldoorn* for their tender, taking the two men with them. Gabriel had not seen these men before; they were definitely not the two who had been in the dining room. Captain Lainsley followed his men and the tender cast off and headed back to Port of Spain.

"I'll find out what happened," van der Decken promised. "I'll be back, *mijnheer.*"

Gabriel watched the little white launch as it came closer. The figure in the stern looked very familiar. A woman, hatless, the morning breeze curling her golden hair. He couldn't believe it. But in an instant, there was no room for doubt and he leaned over the rail and shouted, "Merrill! Merrill!"

She looked up sharply at the sound of her name. She waved at him, called once, voice firm: "Gabriel—wait—"

He waved and grinned back at her. Where, after all, could he go—even if he wanted to desert? He ran to the boarding ladder and went down to help her from the launch, which was rolling in its own wake. Merrill Leeds came across with easy grace. The launch helmsman tossed her two bags on the grating, then waved and cast off and turned back for the shore.

Gabriel said, astonished, "You mean you're—"

Her mouth was tight, but she kissed nim, not too casually, then put her cheek against his briefly. "I'm your wife," she whispered sharply. "Please play it that way. Please."

Gabe goggled at her helplessly, murmured: "Sure. What's a wife more or less?"

"Thanks," she said swiftly, and gripped his arm hard.

CHAPTER XI

STEUBER IS SUBTLE

"COME up on deck," he said, carrying her bags, "and watch yourself. That's Steuber, the chief, and from the murderous look in his eyes, I'd say we were in for trouble." Bitterly he wished that things would stop happening to him without even asking his leave. What, for instance, was Merrill up to? One thing—he was in the mood to fox Steuber.

On deck Mr. Steuber snapped, "I'm sorry, Mr. Adams, but there is no time for visitors. We are clearing!"

"I'm not a visitor," Merrill said coolly. She smiled at him. "I'm sailing with you." She took Gabe's arm again and clung to it like a leech.

Gabriel was stunned. He managed to nod, grinning. It was a horrible grin, he knew, because he did not feel like grinning at all.

Her smile fell on barren ground. Steuber looked at her hard, with just the touch of a sneer and said sharply, "You will remain here while I signal a launch. You cannot sail on this ship, miss. There are no more cabins. You must have learned this ashore."

"I learned nothing of the kind," Merrill replied, frowning. "And I don't like your tone. Gabriel—"

"Take it easy, Steuber," Gabriel said evenly. "I don't like your tone either." Steuber's tone was just one of the many delightful features of the situation Gabe did not like, but it was the only one he could get at.

"I apologize for my tone," Steuber said crisply. "But we have had a good deal of trouble in this port, Mr. Adams, as you have seen for yourself, and I'm sure Captain Klinkert will not tolerate any more nonsense which detains the ship. The *Apeldoorn* runs on schedule and we lose money when these delays—"

Captain Klinkert himself came along the deck, puffing like a beached porpoise. But he did not look nearly so thunderous as before, Gabriel noted. The presence of a

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woman cramped his honest rage. He pulled at his mustache and bowed slightly to Merrill and said, *"Hoezee,* Mr. Steuber. Now what is all this?"

Steuber's eyes were hostile. His blunt-jawed face was ashy and he looked shaken. His lips were white. "The young lady boarded without permission, Captain, and insists on sailing without reservations. She dismissed her launch, and it's gone too far to be recalled."

Captain Klinkert looked grim. "Is this so, *juf-vrouw?* If it is, you are in trouble. I assure you! What is all this, Gabriel?"

Gabriel wished he knew, but he began to extemporize with some degree of glibness.

"It's very simple," Gabriel said, his voice a trifle hoarse. "I'd tell you if I could get a word in edgewise! I haven't had a chance with Steuber howling for blood. You'd think I was a deckhand on this ship instead of a passenger." Gabriel was beginning to warm up to his theme of righteous indignation. What he'd needed all morning, he realized, was a chance to blow his top about something. And this certainly was a lulu.

"Gently, gently," Captain Klinkert replied, taken aback by Gabriel's obviously heartfelt anger. "Mr. Steuber was only doing his duty. If we are to clear—there have been so many interruptions—perhaps our nerves are all on edge, what with poor Cumstock, and those damn Marines, *ja!* Now tell me about the lady. Who is she and in the name of reason why does she wish to sail to Rio on this—this floating madhouse!"

"She happens to be my wife," Gabriel said. He swallowed, and glared around fiercely, ready to take a poke at the first man, woman, or child who challenged the authenticity of his lie.

"Your *vrouw,* Gabriel?" Captain Klinkert roared, astonished. His eyes sparkled, and then he laughed thunderously and slapped his leg. "Why, you young *ezel!* So you took me at my word, *neen?"*

"Your word?" Merrill said, smiling at him. She turned to Gabe. "Oh darling, and all the time I thought it was money. Well, thanks, Captain. It's taken me two years of hard work to make him say yes."

The chief officer's face was brittle. A request to examine the marriage certificate trembled on his lips, but he didn't dare go quite that far. So soon. In these affairs one must be patient, orderly. "May I see your passport, madam?"

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Steuber," Captain Klinkert said instantly. "The passport of Mijnheer Adams covers them both."

"With a marriage certificate," Steuber said. "Without it—" He regarded them triumphantly, pleased with the subtlety of his maneuver. Captain Klinkert brushed him aside with characteristic abruptness.

"You may tell the steward to take Mevrouw Adams' bags to her cabin," Captain Klinkert said.

"Yes, sir," Steuber said, his eyes burning. "I beg your pardon, madam. No insult was intended. It is only that regulations—"

"We know about regulations," Gabriel said.

"Yes, sir," Steuber said, and left them.

Gabriel watched the chief officer's back until it had disappeared amidships into a companionway, and wondered remotely what had shaken him so hard.

"He was very blunt," Merrill said to Captain Klinkert, turning on her charm, "but perhaps it might be better if there were no misunderstandings. Let's clear it up once and for all. . . ."

She patted Gabriel's cheek. "It only goes to show that you can keep a secret too long, darling. If you had broken it to them gradually, they wouldn't have been so shocked. I've the marriage certificate right here, Captain, if you wish to see it."

She unfolded it and handed it to Klinkert who glanced at it politely and instantly returned it to her. Gabriel's jaw dropped to a new low. He felt as if Joe Louis had just hit him in the stomach. Luckily Klinkert didn't notice.

"Wel!" he said with rasping cheerful-

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ness. "This is fine, eh? Only last week I was telling this young herring-lover that he was a fool to consort with *menhaden* instead of angels, and here in a flash, he takes the wind out of my sails!

"I think it is wonderful, *mevrouw,* and I hope you make a human being out of him. I also hope you do not spoil his rummy game!" He chuckled and nicked her under the chin.

"*Ja,* a pretty *echgenoote.* If I had trimmed my mustache, I would kiss the bride! Long life and happiness and many children to you both." He peered at her. "See, Gabriel, a good woman, who does not blush when I am vulgar!"

"You are, on the contrary," replied Merrill, throwing her head back, "one of the nicest captains I've ever met, and not half so disagreeable as you look."

The left-handed compliment won Klinkert completely. He roared with solid laughter, and Gabriel, anxious and puzzled, nevertheless grinned at her cleverness in handling the Dutchman. The grin sickened when he remembered that she was in a practically ideal spot for charming *him* around, too.

CHAPTER XII

HONEYMOONERS SHOULDN'T TALK ABOUT MURDER

THERE were many things, clamoring for his attention, in Gabriel Adams' mind, which was ordinarily a very orderly thing. Now conclusions, guesses and questions had strewn themselves about so completely, that he was reduced to a numb indignation.

He and Merrill did not go below for some time; avoiding by tacit agreement the intimacy of his cabin. The *Apeldoorn* had weighed anchor and was under way. The familiar hum of the turbine, and the faint, comfortable tremble of the turning screw came alive; and at the aft masthead, the red, white and blue Dutch flag fluttered in the wind which rose with their movement toward the Bocas del Dragon.

Gabriel felt small relief that they were actually under way, but he could not shake off a feeling of dread that crowded him against a hard blank wall.

Merrill Leeds had thrust her arm through his as they hung on the port rail and watched the city of Port of Spain recede as they neared the great red and gray stone cliffs of the strait where terns and sea birds, rested on the guana-weighted ledges above the black caves.

Her face was drawn and now and then her chin shook a little. Gabriel squeezed her hand and put his head close to hers and murmured, "Merrill—I think I'm going to break your neck. Lovely morning, isn't it, dear."

"Heavenly. We can't talk here," she said, her voice unsteady.

"Be careful, Gabriel, do be careful. See all those birds!"

"Nasty, honking brutes. I'll be careful," he said. "But I want to know where I stand. I mean, of course, don't take me into your confidence unless you feel like it. People have been pushing me around for days now."

She seemed not to have heard him as she watched the shoreline come closer as they reached the strait and started through the islands of the Bocas del Dra[illegible].

Gabriel continued soberly, "Listen, Merrill. This thing is going to be complicated. It's going to be damned complicated. And when we try to simplify it, that eel Steuber will complicate it again."

"Please be careful," she said.

"You don't know him," Gabriel said. "Matter of fact, I don't know him either. I thought Thimm was bad enough. But Thimm is an amateur. Take my word for it, Steuber is no ordinary officer."

Merrill glanced at him sharply. "Why do you say that?"

"He's used to being obeyed," Gabriel said. "Couldn't you feel that? Where he comes from, he's been handing out discipline, not taking it. He could've cut our hearts out for making him down-dog before Captain Klinkert. He'll make a very bad enemy, but then, there's no such thing as a good enemy."

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"I'm sorry, Gabriel," Merrill Leeds murmured. "I'm afraid I've got you in a mess."

"You exaggerate. Of course we'll probably all be killed but let's not be alarmists."

"I had to take the chance," she said. "I left it to you when I came aboard. I thought if you didn't want any part of it you'd tell them I was a liar."

"How could I? Fine rat I'd have been."

His eyes fell to her left hand, and he stared at it. There was an exquisitely thin-banded platinum wedding ring on the third finger. Gabriel gasped, fingering it.

"That's ours," she said. "It was my mother's."

"Of course. Probably even have rice in your hair. How was I at the wedding? I thought I did the *I dos* with fine resonance. . . . You thought of everything, didn't you?"

"I hope I did—I don't know—"

"That trick certificate— You put Machiavelli to shame."

THE open sea lay before the *Apeldoorn's* bow and the ship began to feel its motion. She began a slow, rhythmic pitching.

Gabriel felt eyes on his back and glanced aft. Mr. Steuber was on the port wing-tip of the bridge and looked away instantly. Gabriel said, "That guy doesn't quite believe it."

"Who doesn't?" asked Merrill without looking.

"Our friend with the Cassius face and the eyes of a prophet."

"Of a Soucouyan, you mean."

Gabriel laughed. "What's that, a Trinidad *jumbie?*"

"Yes. Soucouyans take off their skin between midnight and dawn and become vengeful balls of fire, entering rooms through keyholes and sucking blood from the hearts of their victims."

"The analogy is well-drawn," Gabriel said. "Mr. Steuber may yet discard his present skin and show us who he really is. And the antidote?"

"Grains of rice sprinkled around the victim. The Soucouyan must pick up every grain before he can reach the victim, and by then, dawn may have come and it will be too late."

"In other words, red herrings should be lavishly sprinkled. You know, there's good sense in most of these darkie superstitions, and this one hits home with uncommon logic. And what is dawn to be in our case —Rio?"

"Bahia will do nicely."

Gabriel began to understand. "It's getting windy," he said. "Let's go below?" His voice was hard. "I want to know about this."

"Yes." She looked tired. "Let's go down."

"Happy is the bride, my dear. You look as if you were contemplating divorce. Or race suicide."

"I'm sorry. I'll do better."

THEY went down to Gabriel's cabin. He wondered what the devil Hans van der Decken was thinking. He could almost picture the steward's perplexity from the indecisive way in which Merrill's bags had been placed inside the door, almost tentatively, as if they really couldn't remain there.

Have to tell Hans, Gabriel thought; have to tell some one. Things were going to be amazingly difficult. He wondered if Merrill realized what she had let them both in for, and now that he fully realized himself, he began to lose heart.

There were, after all, too many details to be considered. It was easy to pretend a marriage on the bright sunlit deck of a boat, or even in a hotel room before a screaming young woman. It was easy when you had witnesses to impress, but it was not easy at all when there was no one but yourselves.

That was the catch, the working of the deception in his cabin.

Inside, Gabriel locked the door, led her through the sitting room into the bedroom. He had the largest accommodations on the boat, and the largest could have been

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dropped into a third-class tourist cabin on a first-class liner.

"Sit down," he said. "Have a cigarette and relax. If you want to cry, go ahead, but do it quietly or they'll think I'm beating you already." He frowned at her. "You feel pretty much gone, don't you?"

"I don't know," she said. Her voice was firmer. "I don't feel like crying. That's an odd thing about me. I've never felt like crying in a crisis. I wait until it's all over; then I howl. Dad always said it wasn't womanly of me."

"The cad. Why I never met anyone so completely feminine. The shy way you bustled up that ladder and flung yourself at my neck—"

"Beast!"

Gabriel patted her hand and gave her a cigarette. Lighting it, he said, "This isn't getting us anywhere. Do you realize how much you've bitten off? I shudder to think of it.

"In the first place, not knowing me, you took an awful chance. I'm in a wonderful position to take advantage of you. All right, I know I'm a curly lamb and look like one, but the chance was there. This wedding ring business was good, and so was that marriage certificate—how did you swing that?"

"It's forged."

"But where did you get it? Is it real?"

"Oh yes, it's real. I got it from Mr. Buxley, who is a barrister and a friend of ours."

"Good enough. That put you on the boat. How did you expect to keep up the pretense of marriage? I mean, it's almost out of the question, Merrill."

"I couldn't get passage," Merrill said, smoking. "They told me that all cabins were booked. I was honestly desperate, Gabriel. I had to get aboard. I was sure after I got aboard, they could put me up some place. So I really used the wedding to stay here until it was too late for them to put me off, y'know."

"It's too late now. So what?"

She looked unsure of herself. "I don't know. I've a passport all right. I thought I'd make a clean breast to the captain and—well—find a cabin somehow. Surely some one cancelled."

Gabriel said, "You don't get it. Most of the cabins on this ship are unoccupied. But they've been paid for. It sounds crazy and it is crazy, almost. And then again, it's quite sane.

"Someone buys up the cabins and keeps people off this boat. . . . But you can't make yourself known on your own passport. That's out of the question, too. First place, it puts me in a spot. Captain Klinkert would never trust me again. Second place, it is dangerous. Damned dangerous."

Merrill nodded. She was cooler. "I'm beginning to see that."

"I take it your father is interested in this boat."

"Yes, that's right."

CHAPTER XIII

THE GAY CONSPIRATOR

HE EYED her sharply. "I've a strong hunch that you've helped your father in the past and that you're helping him now. It's all mixed up in the business of marine insurance, isn't it?" You don't have to answer my questions if you don't want to."

Merrill smiled at him. "You're a very nice man. I'll be honest with you. My dad isn't aboard this ship. He came off her last night safely enough. He's en route to Bahia by now via Pan American. He'll be there when we arrive."

Gabriel was completely mystified. His face showed it. He closed his mouth only when a boldly exploring fly reminded him it was agape.

"You see, the ship was to be sunk. Dad didn't and doesn't know where. He can prevent everything by reaching Bahia ahead of it."

"How?"

"I can't tell you now, but he can."

"And he stuck you aboard to prevent a scuttling en route? That's very nice." Gabriel was annoyed. "How he must love

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his daughter. For two pins I'd scuttle you myself."

"Father despises me," she said, looking amused. Her voice was dry. "I have, well, rather a lot of money and dear old Dad wants to lay his hands on it. Permanently. This is a means to an end. He used to beat me. Now what do we do for a second-act curtain?"

"Cut it out," Gabriel said. Her assurance had returned and she was laughing at him. "I still don't think it was smart."

"Perhaps not, but you don't know the technique of scuttling. Odd thing, Gabriel, but one thing scuttlers like is privacy. No passengers and a trustworthy skeleton crew. No witnesses for Lloyds if it came to a suit and they refused to pay damages. Scuttling is no longer a 'peril of the sea.' What happens to this ship will have to be, supposedly, something else. Explosion. A far-fetched mine from across the ocean."

"I still don't see—"

"It's just that ships aren't scuttled in these waters with American citizens aboard, Gabriel. They'll wait."

Gabriel shuddered. "Why?"

"Your American Navy would be on the way from Guantanamo at once, to investigate such an action."

"How would they know?"

"Because I am to wireless Mr. Buxley every day, and if he doesn't hear from me, he'll get in touch with Dad. And then you'd see things fly.

"Besides, there would be too much to lose," she went on. "There's no crime in scuttling. You can sink all the ships you want, if they belong to you or if you are authorized to do so. Just so you don't try to collect money afterward from insurance. Murder is much too hazardous."

GABRIEL was silent for a moment. He found his pipe and began to suck on it, although the polished bowl was empty. Then he said, "But you're not American. Your British."

"Yes—but I'm your wife. And I'm here to wireless. Who else would have?"

"I see. It's an excellent check, I admit. But if Steuber found a lonely spot . . ."

"He isn't going to find a lonely spot."

"Why not?"

Merrill stared out the open port at the sea. "There are a lot of ships on this ocean, y'know. And quite by accident, we're going to keep meeting some of them all the way to Bahia."

She turned to him. "A ship doesn't plunge to the bottom when you open her cocks. She takes a long time, and so many scuttlers have had the bad luck to see their ships remain afloat when they should have been gone. There's a famous case—the *Ioanna*—in 1921."

"What happened?"

"She was supposed to have struck a mine. She was abandoned. Her master said she sank at three-thirty in the morning. At the trial, it developed that she had remained afloat—sinking all the time—for thirteen hours; and pictures of her sinking were taken the next day by a passing ship who came upon her.

"The *Ioanna* wanted privacy, and if she had had it, Lloyds might have been bilked. As it was . . ." She smiled and shrugged. "Mr. Steuber won't have empty ocean to try the same trick"

"I'll be damned," said Gabriel. "You mean your father actually will divert ships to us by radio to keep Steuber on his toes?"

"Definitely."

"Well, you live and learn." He stared at her. "But what about you and me? We haven't solved that. You can't show your passport, Merrill. Steuber knows your father now, and the name Leeds isn't common. If he knew you were aboard—and why—he might be difficult."

"I hadn't considered that, but you're right."

"There wouldn't be much point in his going to Bahia if he could see the handwriting on the wall and know that he wouldn't be leaving Bahia. That's the general idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," Merrill said.

"How does your father plan to swing that little trick?"

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"I don't know, and it's none of my business. I'm only here to safeguard the *Apeldoorn* by sending a harmless radio message every day. The day that message is missed by Mr. Buxley, Dad will divert some one to our vicinity quicker than you can say boo."

"Never say it myself." He grinned. "You seem to have sublime confidence in the scheme. It's merely your neck, after all, if something goes phooey."

"I have," she said, smiling. "We worked it before. Not me personally. But Dad and an operative. It went very nicely. No floating corpses. No casualties. No blows."

Gabriel did not return the smile. "My opinion doesn't mean anything, I know, but either you've got the nerve of a barracuda or a really touching faith in the might of right. I think you ought to have your head examined for coming aboard this ship to send a wireless every day, and I think your father . . . Oh well, let's not fight."

"GOOD," Merrill said. "You're reforming. But seriously, what will I do? A puritanical soul like yourself would find any mutual arrangement in this cabin unbearable. Can you suggest anything else?"

"I could jump overboard, of course," Gabriel said tartly. "I don't suppose there's any reason why you couldn't bunk in the bedroom. I'll take the living-room here. The sofa is sound and almost comfortable. I could stand it."

"You're making a clandestine situation sound awfully dull," she said. She laughed.

"I didn't mean to make it sound dull. Only decent," Gabriel replied. "After all, Merrill, it might be different if we were in love, but we're not. You did me a favor; I'm ready to do you one. It's a high-toned arrangement and wholly moral, and with a minimum of good sense and co-operation, I don't see any reason why we can't both have respective and strict privacy, once within the cabin. After all, there isn't any real reason why I should have a cabin to myself just because I paid for one. Self-sacrifice is the keynote of the day."

"I see," Merrill said. She looked mildly annoyed. "You're quite right. A moral arrangement. Outside we act like honeymooners; inside I'll have no charm whatsoever. I don't suppose I even need bother to lock myself in. Who'd smash down doors to make love to *me?*"

"I didn't say that."

"But that's the idea."

"Yes," he growled, bedeviled and sore.

"All right," Merrill said icily. "I'm sure if you can stand it, I'll manage."

Gabriel had the impression she had thrust out a feeler for a really rousing quarrel. He ignored it and said, "It's time for lunch. Let's eat. I haven't finished my questions. There are still things I want to know."

"Oh, of course!" Merrill said, taking that for granted. "I never saw such a curious man. I'll change into something else. I won't take a minute."

She took half an hour and he got his first taste of the marital pause that enrages; but he bore up in the interim apathetically, glancing at his watch now and then. It was all very well for her to have such an airy opinion of the possibility of murder. He did not feel so blithe about it himself. Capital offense or not, as compared with the nefarious business of scuttling a ship, the fact remained that Mr. Cumstock had hung by the neck until he was dead.

CHAPTER XIV

SAFETY TO BAHIA

BY MID-AFTERNOON, the *Apeldoorn* had left Galina Point and was headed east south-east in the general direction of Africa. She began her sweeping circle of the South American Guianas and the northeastern coastline of Brazil, her compass course drawn on a point off Cape San Roque north of Pernambuco.

Gabriel wondered whether it was mere coincidence that a tramp sugar-freighter, outward bound, appeared on the horizon ahead of them as they overtook her. Surely Clements Leeds had not contacted that old

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wallowing hulk with her rusty sides, for she could not have carried wireless. But when they neared her, he saw her antennae, and wondered again.

She had been suspiciously slow until they neared, and then she picked up speed. She lost the race, of course, for the *Apeldoorn* cruised at fourteen knots.

Even so, the tramp managed to hang in their wake all afternoon, losing them finally in the infinity of darkness which dropped down. . . .

The afternoon of the following day, Gabriel and Merrill lounged on the boat deck in steamer chairs, soaking up the sun. The trades blew gustily and there were long roiled graybacks as the Guianas fell away and left them in the open; the *Apeldoorn* took up a gentle rolling, for the wind and the seas were on her beam.

At four o'clock, van der Decken brought them tea.

The steward was uneasy and nonplussed. He presented Merrill with tea so gingerly as to be comical. Gabriel had to smile, for the steward matched the manner with which a nervous woman would handle an adder. Hans looked very embarrassed and distraught, the wind whipping his blond hair askew over his ears. His face was redder.

"There was a message for you, *mijnheer,*" he said when Gabriel refused a cup. He thrust an envelope at Gabriel and vanished with an awkward smile.

"Is that the van der Decken you spoke of?" Merrill Leeds asked. "I don't think he likes me."

"You scare him," Gabriel said.

He ripped open the envelope and pulled out a letter penned scrupulously in van der Decken's adolescent writing. He read quickly, "Mijnheer Adams, I have been trying to have a word with you, but the lady is with you all the time. Is it some trick or is it that you are truly married? I cannot believe it could happen so fast after the way we talked yesterday morning, but such things are possible. Please where can I see you to talk to you? Hans."

"When you finish that tea, we'll go below," Gabriel said. "He wants to see me, and he doesn't know where you stand."

"The poor chap," she murmured. "He was dreadfully uneasy. Why don't you run down yourself and see him, Gabriel?"

"All right. You don't mind being alone? I'll be right back."

"Not a bit of it," she replied. "It's lovely up here."

"Yes," Gabriel said, glancing up at the bridge. "But you never know."

"It's really all right. Soucouyans wait until midnight."

IN THE cabin below, he rang for van der Decken, and when the steward arrived, Gabriel let him in and locked the door. "Keep it soft and low," Gabriel said. "And take it easy."

"*Leive hemel,* Gabriel, is it true? Are you married to *meisje?*"

"No," Gabriel said. "But if you tell a soul, I shall have to cut your throat. It will grieve me, but there it is. There wasn't any other way she could sail. It's a very respectable arrangement. You've got to play it that way with us. Might be dangerous if you don't."

"*Ja,* I play it," van der Decken said. His eyes were bright. "Dangerous is the word, *mijnheer.* Those two men the soldiers took off yesterday morning, you know who they were?"

"Marines, not soldiers. Who were they?"

"Germans," said van der Decken. "Sailors from the *Graf Spee!*"

"No," said Gabriel. "They'd be fools to go to Trinidad. I don't believe it."

"They went to Trinidad to board the ship," van der Decken said. He wet his lips and took a breath.

"Gabriel, you must listen to me very sharply for it is mixed up but there is meaning in it.

"Those two were German sailors. From Captain Klinkert's own mouth I heard it. They had forged passports from Argentina, and the English captain said he was arresting them because he suspected they were escaped from internment. Do you see? *Spee* seamen, from Buenos Aires!"

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Gabriel studied the steward silently, his jaw set. "Will you tell me why two Nazi sailors would make their way to a British port to board this ship? Why did they take the risk? They could have boarded her at Rio—"

He paused thoughtfully. "Unless we aren't going to Rio."

"But we *are* going to Rio."

"Don't be so optimistic," said Gabriel grimly. "What else?"

"That insurance man, Leeds, who came on night before last. Do you know what he did with the captain? He searched the ship, *mijnheer,* for infernal machines. He told Captain Klinkert he had evidence which pointed to the scuttling of the *Apeldoorn.*"

"They didn't find anything?"

"Not a thing." Van der Decken shook his head gravely. "This is a bad business. It is bad because Captain Klinkert says such a thing is mad. This ship is making good money. The Royal Dutch has never been involved in a scuttling. Never."

"I know," Gabriel said. "But maybe you're on the wrong tack."

"How do you mean, *mijnheer?*"

"Let's forget the Royal Dutch Lines and put the plot for scuttling on individuals. You said they were Germans. I think Thimm, the radio officer, is German. He isn't Dutch. He speaks English like an Englishman. He said he had lived in the United States for a long time, but if that were so, he'd speak some American slang."

"Suppose so? Then what, Gabriel?"

"Well, why, tell me why, would a group of Germans be interested in scuttling this ship? You've got fuel oil aboard. Is it bound for the Falklands, for British ships?"

"*Neen.* It is consigned to Rio de Janeiro."

"THEN it's oil from a neutral to a neutral. Why scuttle her?" Gabriel rubbed his chin reflectively. "It would be an act of war, almost."

"Why do you say almost?"

"Because it could skip the official sanction of the Wilhelmstrasse by being the piratical work of individuals. That's always a swell way for a country to crawl out of a hole. *But why?*"

"That can't be it, *mijnheer,* it must be something else."

"Then you tell me what it is. I'm giving up."

"I don't know. I wish I knew. But it is no daydream, I can tell. Captain Klinkert walks like a *kat* and he watches like a *havik.* You know the *kapitein* was never a nervous man but he is nervous today, *ja!*

"Those other passengers, they are Germans too. But they are Brazil Germans from the hinterland at Ouro Preto. They stay in their cabins and eat there. They never flew down from New York."

"I suspected not."

"They don't like me to go in the cabins. They take food at the door. This afternoon, one rang and I went and took tea. Very odd, *mijnheer.* They have opened no baggage. They have put their valises under the bed. *Vreemd?*"

"Tell me more."

"This woman—"

"Merrill, you mean?"

"*Neen,* not your *vrouw.* This other woman—"

Gabriel sat erect. "I meant to ask you about her. Who is she? I haven't seen a sign of her on deck."

"*Ja,* she does not leave her cabin at all."

"What's her name?"

"On the passenger list, it is Letti Gaynor."

Gabriel was electrified. He sprang to his feet and gripped van der Decken by the shoulders. "Small? Very pretty? Delicate face? Rather pale? Brown hair?"

"*Ja!* That is she."

GABRIEL grabbed his pipe and tobacco pouch and began to ram tobacco shreds into the bowl with fervor, packing them so tight that the pipe would never draw.

"I'm damned," he growled. "I'm damned."

"You know her?"

"Know her?" Gabriel said sharply. "I

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have a screaming acquaintance with her. Is she with the other three men who came aboard?"

"I don't think so. She has been quite alone, except once, she talked with Mr. Steuber, but only for a minute."

"That's as far as you know," Gabriel said. "But how much do you see? Damned little. How did she get aboard if the cabins were bought up?"

"But she had bought one—in New York. She was meant to sail from New York. She was on the list there. She must have flown down to Port of Spain."

"Yes, of course," Gabriel said absently.

The picture was becoming much clearer, and he began to appreciate the Trinidad imbroglio. Miss Gaynor had had orders to detain him, if possible, to divert him from the *Apeldoorn*. He assumed that she and Fritz Steuber and Rudolph Thimm were confederates. That being so, it was Thimm who had wirelessed her in Port of Spain that he, Gabriel, had left the ship to procure an ancient fish, that he would plane in to Port of Spain, that he would put up at the Queen's Park.

Letti Gaynor knew then.

Her very presence indicated to him that the *Apeldoorn* would reach Bahia safely, for it was unlikely that the ship should meet with an accident with the girl aboard.

Possibly, and logically, Bahia would be the jumping-off place. From Bahia, the *Apeldoorn* would put to sea and disappear; and without doubt, Mr. Steuber's plans precluded the presence of anyone aboard inimical to the scheme.

IT WAS likely then that Letti Gaynor, Merrill and himself, were meant to be left behind at Bahia, somehow. The same idea had been worked on him, at Trinidad. The three young Germans who had managed to remain unseized by the British, would join Steuber in a command of the ship.

He wondered what would happen to Captain Klinkert, to Hans?

Nothing, of course. That was his satisfaction. Nothing at all would happen. They *were* going to Bahia. Letti Gaynor said so by being a passenger. So there was nothing to worry about. For Clements Leeds was a jump ahead of them. At Bahia, the authorities would be waiting.

Gabriel said, "I wouldn't tell Merrill—Miss Leeds—oh hell—I mean Mrs. Adams about Letti Gaynor, Hans."

"Ik versta het, mijnheer," said van der Decken. He nodded and then winked. "But I keep an eye on her all the same, *ja?"*

"That won't be necessary," Gabriel replied. "This is one time when a resumption of acquaintance might do *me* some good instead of her. If you want to keep an eye on anybody, keep it on Captain Klinkert, because no one can pull a thing while he's still master."

"I almost forgot!" van der Decken exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "You will eat with Captain Klinkert tonight." He grinned. "A honeymoon party with champagne."

"Oh Lord," Gabriel said, appalled.

"You will have to do it, *mijnheer,* unless—"

"No, we'll do it. Some one's at the door. Tell the captain it will be an honor." Gabriel opened the door at the sound of the knock, and Merrill came in.

"It's raining," she said cheerfully. "Sky is rather black too. Looks like a squall. I stayed deserted as long as possible." She glanced at the steward.

"He knows," Gabriel said.

"Oh?" She shrugged and smiled. "And what do you think, Mr. van der Decken?"

Hans van der Decken grinned, flushing a little. "I was only thinking, Juf-vrouw Leeds—*Neen!* Mevrouw Adams! I was only thinking that it is a pity that isn't true for Mijnheer Adams would be a very lucky fellow."

"Indeed he would," she replied gracefully. "I'm a rare catch. You turn a very pretty phrase; is your name Hans?"

"Ja, mevrouw."

"We're going to be friends, Hans. No woman could withstand such vigorous flattery."

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VAN DER DECKEN grinned, bowed, pleased with her and himself. Then he stepped out and was gone, after an exchange of looks with Gabriel.

As soon as the steward's footsteps faded down the corridor, Merrill sank down wearily on the sofa. "Any news?" she said.

"Yes," Gabriel said. "Pretty good news. We're really on the way to Bahia and that means trouble is over, if your dad does good work."

"Dad will."

"Then you can relax. We're really going there, and I'm quite sure that whatever was planned is supposed to happen after the departure from Bahia."

"Were you worried about *me*, Gabriel?"

Gabriel shook his head.

His mind was on the threat to the *Apeldoorn*. He couldn't fathom it. He said absently, "As a matter of fact, no, Merrill. You're one girl who seems to be quite capable of taking care of herself.

"I was worried mostly about Captain Klinkert; his being such a stalwart soul, they would have had to murder him before they began any operations at all. And there was Thomas.

"I mean, it may be silly to worry about a fish, but this is the first time an *isopholis orthotomous* had turned up in literal aeons, and it would be a minor catastrophe—"

He did not see Merrill's approach until she was within striking distance. Instinct told him to duck—so did the blaze in her eyes. But he didn't duck. He just stood.

Her hand came up sharply and slapped him across the cheek.

"You—you idiot!" she stormed. And slapped him again.

Then, resolutely and firmly, she turned on her heel and went into the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Gabe ran his fingers tenderly over the red welt on his cheek. He eyed the blankness of the door with imploring eyes. "Now would you please tell me what in blazes is biting her?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Water Flows Downhill

By JIM KJELGAARD
Author of "When the Pack Gathered," "First Catch Your Beaver" etc.

Tenderfoot, don't play smart in the wild lands; the only shortcuts lead to disaster

THE sixty-four little buckskin bags each held sixteen ounces of gold. Dad Kerr packed them into eight separate packs of eight bags each. That way, if there was any kind of accident, they wouldn't lose it all. Not that Dad expected an accident. Accidents took place only when Johnny had a hand in whatever the two of them were doing.

Dad packed the food and blankets. He would carry his rifle and there was no use taking any of the tools. As long as he lived he would never have any use for a pick and shovel or a gold pan. After forty years on the bonanza trail at last he had made a strike.

The two horses that had packed his freight in here were grazing in the rich grass by the river. The two horses belonged to the Keating Ranch and Dad had borrowed them on the way in. Borrowing wasn't the same as rustling. Dad intended to take the horses back, though, of course, he mustn't let Johnny know that.

Johnny would raise a fuss if he even thought that he was going a couple of steps out of his way for anybody else. Dad didn't like fusses and would do almost anything to avoid one.

The horses raised their heads and arched their necks in a friendly way when Dad approached. He led them back to the cabin and adjusted the pack harnesses while the horses stood patiently, stamping their feet and switching flies with their tails. Dad bridled them and tied them to a tree.

The boy swung the clubbed gun swiftly, and Dad went down

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Expertly he adjusted the packs, making sure that the load hung evenly on both sides and that the horses were not chafed or scraped by any part of the harness. He patted the horse's noses and for the last time looked at the hole out of which he and Johnny had taken thirty-six thousand dollars worth of gold. It was that simple: Look for it forty days and when it was found get it all in fifteen days.

Dad was glad. He was sixty-five, and he felt that he had earned the little cabin on Puget Sound that he had dreamed of since he had been on the gold trail. Eighteen thousand dollars was more than he would need all the rest of his life. Of course, half the gold belonged to Johnny. Dad looked at his big watch and glanced impatiently at the cabin. It was seven o'clock and they should be an hour on their way.

At last Johnny came out of the cabin, his .38 buckled about his waist. Dad had picked Johnny up in Seattle thinking that he might be all right on a trail—and that was Dad's mistake. If there was a bigger tenderfoot Dad didn't know where he could be found.

Not that he had expected Johnny to know everything, but they'd been out four months and Johnny knew no more than he had when they started. He was still the town loafer Dad had picked up, though there was no way of knowing those things about a man until you got out with him.

WELL, Dad would be rid of Johnny soon and it was good riddance. Johnny had whined, sworn, and gotten mad at everything that didn't go right, and apparently nothing was right. He had, to give credit where credit was due, worked hard enough when they found the gold.

"You ready?" Johnny demanded.

"All set," Dad said mildly.

Johnny took out a pocket compass and balanced it in his hand. Dad snorted. He never had held much with compasses and such because he could always set himself right by landmarks. Compasses were all right for those who needed them, but you had to know how to use a compass or it wasn't of any more use than a pin cushion.

"Which way we going?" Johnny asked.

Dad waved a hand at a snow-covered peak that seemed to be almost within rifle shot, but was five days away.

"That's Needle Mountain," he said. "We make a bee-line for her, pick up a boat I've got there, an' take to the river. The hosses we'll leave loose."

Johnny furrowed his brows. "You got a boat there?"

"Yup. Left her there last year. She'll be trim yet because I left her high an' dry. Give her an hour soakin' an' she'll be watertight."

"Well," Johnny's voice was very casual, "where is the boat?"

"We can't miss her," Dad assured him. "We just keep towards Ol' Needle. Right at its base we come to a river a mite smaller'n this one. There's six big white birches on it, an' the boat's under them. We climb in her an' sail right down to Gantryville without a tap of work on our part."

"Suppose you can't find the birches?"

"Hell!" Dad exploded. "You can find 'em if you ain't blind! There ain't but one river an' one clump of birches. They loom up like a red cart against a snowdrift."

Dad caught his breath expecting one of Johnny's tantrums to follow this. Instead, for the first time in weeks, Johnny was civil.

"I was just thinking that something might happen and I'd have to find it alone."

"That is an idea," Dad admitted. "I'll make you a map."

He broke off a stick and knelt down, his long gray hair falling forward and his beard touching the ground. With the pointed end of the stick he began to sketch a crude map on the ground.

"Here's where we are an' up here's Needle Mountain. That can't get out of sight on account it's so big. When you get right about here you strike a lot of little ridges where you can see a crack runnin' up the face of the mountain. Head straight for it, the birches are right under it.

"You couldn't miss. If you thought you might you could head to the right of the

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split, strike the river, an' go down. You'd be sure to hit the white birches. Now right here—"

Dad looked up just in time to see Johnny's heavy revolver swinging through the air. He tried to duck and couldn't. The last thing he remembered was a stinging pain in his head and a million bright stars.

DAD struggled and moved about several times during the day, but it was a dazed, uncomprehending motion. When he finally awoke to thought he still saw stars, but it was ten minutes more before he realized that they were now in the sky and not in his head.

He felt strangely as though his body was floating in space. His head pounded. Dad raised a hand to it and felt a mass of blood that had seeped through his hair and coagulated. Then he recalled what had happened, and knew that the only reason his skull wasn't crushed was because of his heavy hair.

He crawled to the river and ducked his head. The water was cool, fresh, seemed to clear his muddled brain. He swore mildly. Johnny, the poison varmint, had lit out with the horses and the gold. But there was no use in getting all churned up about something had had already happened, and so couldn't be stopped.

Dad crawled back to the cabin, climbed up on a bunk, and tried to sleep. A good sleep would put him in the proper frame of mind.

But his head hurt badly and he couldn't get to sleep for four hours. When he did, he slept all the rest of the night and far into the morning. He touched his head with his hand and winced as he felt a bruise there. He pressed a little harder and sighed in relief. His skull wasn't fractured. He guessed it would take more than a revolver swung by a tenderfoot to break that.

He slid out of the bunk and went outside. A bright sun ruled the day. Needle Mountain loomed big and startlingly close. Johnny was a long way toward it by now, and there was no use chasing him. With a day's start even Johnny could stay ahead of him. Dad went back to the cabin and sat down.

His head was better now, most of the pounding and whirling was gone. Johnny's blow had given him nothing more than a bad concussion that was rapidly wearing off. By noon he was hungry and cooked and ate a rabbit that he had shot two days before and hung in the spring to keep cool. He lay in the bunk for an hour after dinner, then checked up to see what he had.

Johnny hadn't taken his rifle, which was smart of him. The rifle was a .44 and the only one of its kind in the country. It would be recognized any place as Dad Kerr's. Dad threw the breech open and saw that the magazine was still full of shells. He had another half-box of shells in his pocket.

In addition to the rifle there were the mining tools, an old ax, and about seventy-five feet of rope hanging in the cabin.

Shouldering the rifle, Dad started through the trees behind the cabin. He had gone scarcely a half-mile when he jumped three muledeer. A fat buck with spike horns bounced a few steps and stopped to stand with his head over his shoulder looking back.

Dad raised the rifle, took aim, and pressed the trigger. Black smoke belched from the muzzle of the gun and the buck fell. Dad dragged it back to camp. He could eat the liver tonight and by tomorrow the meat, though tough, would be edible.

Supper eaten, Dad sat in front of the fire looking into it. Johnny probably had a cold and fireless camp tonight, but that wouldn't matter to Johnny as long as he had the thirty-six thousand dollars too. No doubt he thought he had worked everything awfully cleverly. Probably the reason he had not shot Dad was because he thought he had killed him with the blow on the head. Dad sighed. He had gone out of his way for Johnny many a time.

THE next morning Dad was up with dawn. He ate some of the venison and with the ax and rope in his hand walked up the river to where it made a sharp right angle bend.

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He selected a thirty-foot pine, cut it down, and trimmed off all the branches and fifteen feet of the small end to make a good solid log fifteen feet long. With a short pry stick he started to roll it toward the river. It was hot, and hard work for one man, but there was no hurry. It would take Johnny at least five days to reach Needle Mountain and the boat.

By noon the log rested on the river bank. Dad notched both ends with the ax and cut a ten-foot length from the rope. He tied it around the notch at the butt of the log and to a tree on the bank. Then he pushed the log into the river and let it swing at anchor.

That was all the work necessary for one day. Except for a little tenderness when he touched it, Dad's head was all right now and he was rather enjoying this stay in the wilderness freed from Johnny's petulant protests and whines. He cut the rest of the venison into strips, built a wooden rack, and hung the meat on it with a smoky fire under it. Smoked meat would keep a long time. He could, of course, get another deer, but nobody with any sense killed more than they needed.

The next day he cut another log and tied it to the bank opposite the first one. As before he returned to the cabin to loaf and rest at noon.

The following day was a little harder. Dad cut two logs, notched them at both ends, and tied one to each of the logs already in the river. He let them float while he returned to the trees and cut an eight-foot pole which he pointed at one end.

Wading to the middle of the river, where the water was up to his shoulders, he held the pole upright and with the flat side of his ax drove it as far as he could into the river bottom. He gathered big rocks, carried them out, and piled them about the upright pole to hold it more solid. It was almost three o'clock when he finished.

The following three days he cut two logs each day and tied them to the two already cut so that on each side of the river he had a string of five logs tied end to end. Each string was about eighty feet long.

Early on the ninth day after Johnny had gone, with the rifle in one hand and twenty feet of rope in the other, Dad went up-river to where he had tied the logs. He waded in and looped the rope around the notch in the end of the last log on the right bank.

Gently he swung it out into the river and the rest of the logs swung with it. The current, which appeared to be slow, brushed against the logs and surged over them. Inch by inch Dad fought until finally the end log was against the post he had driven in the middle of the river.

He tied the log to the post and went to the left bank for the log chain tied there. With his hands he forced it over until the end log of the five touched the post.

Dad lashed the two end logs together with a foot of space between them. Then he cut the whole thing loose from the post and had a curving log boom reaching clear across the river.

DAD looked at his nickel watch. It was half past one. He waded to the bank and slept with the rifle in his hand and his head pillowed against the base of a pine tree. In two hours more he woke up and arose to lean against the tree. His log boom still blocked the river.

After another hour he grew tired standing and sat with the rifle across his knees. But he never averted his gaze from the river for more than a few seconds at a time. Just before dark a boat swept around the right angle bend.

Sitting in the rear seat, Johnny backed water frantically when he saw the logs blocking the river. But he was too close to it to get away. The bow of the boat slid over a log and raised as the current pushed it further over. The stern, weighted down by Johnny, hung low in the water. Johnny jumped to his feet, the .38 in his hand.

Again Dad's .44 belched black powder. The revolver went spinning out of Johnny's hand to make a little splash in the river. Dad spoke calmly.

"All right, Johnny. The next one's goin' right through your middle unless you act just igg-zactly right."

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Johnny acted just exactly right. Holding the rifle in one hand, Dad waded out, cut the boom, and motioned Johnny into the front of the boat. Dad climbed in the back seat and took up the steering oar.

Johnny sat quietly, nursing his hand. Blood oozed from a cut on his trigger finger. His eyes were murderous.

In the bow, wedged under the boy's seat, was the eye-iron that Dad used for an anchor. Johnny found it with his feet. Dad was leaning back comfortably in the stern, with the steering oar nestled under his arm.

Johnny inched the iron forward under his foot.

"Trouble with you, Johnny," Dad said, "is you're too impulsive.

"Take that iron you're figgerin' on throwin' at me. Got a rope on it. Can't throw the iron this far. Rope isn't long enough." Dad paused.

"You're lucky I ain't as impulsive as some people you might meet up here, Johnny," he said easily. "Otherwise I never would of went to all the trouble of buildin' a log boom to catch you. You would of went driftin' down the river a-bangin' away with that blunderbuss, and I would of had to shoot you. That would of been hard on you.

"Mebbe I should of shot you anyway, but I ain't as mad at you as I'd ought to be. After all, you done a sort of favor for me by savin' me a trip. You know how I hate people bein' mad an' cussin' one another in camp.

"I didn't want to see you all tore up again an' have to listen to you, so I never told you that them five days to Needle Mountain was a side trip to take Hank Keating's hosses back to where they'd drift home. The river up there is the same as comes by here, an' you an' me are goin' straight down it to Gantryville. There's a marshal there, Johnny."

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

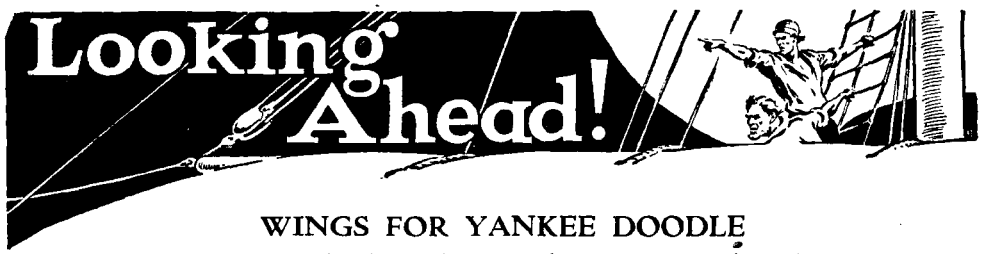
THIS week the department is devoted to one correspondent, a man who is sincerely interested in ARGOSY's well being. His letter was originally much longer than it is now, so long that we obviously could not find space for all of it. Therefore, we had to cut; we hope that we have not done grave injuries.

One comment we do want to make. Our correspondent feels that we're not fair to the critical letters in Argonotes. We play fast and loose with them, he says; we deliberately cover up. If we have appeared to do that, we are really concerned about it, because that is not the function of this department. Criticism is valuable, and we want to treat it with the respect it deserves. . . . Now we give you the extremely interesting letter by

DARREL LEFEVER

ARGOSY is a sort of Bible to me. I live with it through all its trials and am constantly trying to think of ways to better it. I think it is a great magazine and certainly one that has given me many hours of pure enjoyment.

Personally I will rate this magazine over any slick or other pulp on the market. Yet in many ways I am disappointed with the trend you have taken lately. You always make a great point of saying that boosts and knocks have an equal chance in Argonotes. But I am sure that



WINGS FOR YANKEE DOODLE

Johnny Hex went to Finland—and met a horse. Previously Johnny had not known any horses, only machines; in fact, he had not known any living thing that could look at him without calculation and dislike. So it was Yukka the horse who turned Johnny Hex, a morose and ugly greaseball, into a warrior and a warrior's legend. An exceptional novelet of the Finnish battle for freedom and a man who helped fight it, by

LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

F.O.B. DISASTER

Most delightful of all the Bilge and Binnacle excursions into chaos; including a hay ride by water, an ascent from the bottomless pit, and the complete demolition of a super-tough crook's super-sybaritic hangout. With several new bone-crushing developments by the amiable Tug Raffin, who never fights unless he is annoyed. A grin-and-guffaw novelet by

CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—SEPTEMBER 7

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you have gotten more than two letters concerning the page cut in ARGOSY. I blew up when you cut to a hundred and twelve pages. Why? Because you dropped to two serials and Argonotes has suffered another drastic cut. If this is progress, then let's start going backward as fast as we can.

I know some really wonderful stories came out in '38 and '39, and I want to congratulate you on Forester, Brand, Zagat, Binder, Merritt, Elston, Burroughs, Beyer, Short, Foster, Sale, and all the rest of those grand writers. But really we aren't getting the support in '40 that we should have. You point with pride to Zagat. I say that the series of short novels could have been written into a six- or seven-part serial which would have been the surprise hit of the year.

You point with pride to Kildare. I don't like to see any character appear in book-length novels more than two or three times. Look at Tarzan. Twenty or thirty novels about him have cheapened him in my opinion. I hope you understand what I am trying to say. You have had some good stories, of course, but on the average I think they have fallen off.

C. M. Warren has written some good stories, but do you think he has the polish of the old masters? I enjoy his stories, but his latest doesn't compare with Zane Grey or some of those other grand writers who really knew and lived in the West they wrote about.

Another thing. You always use mob psychology or something of the kind on anyone registering a kick in Argonotes. Of course there are some letters that are impossible, but others that are plausible get it just the same. For every knock you can always print two boosters. The crowd always goes for the underdog and as a consequence you have a bunch of gray beards crying in their beer over some poor little innocent author. A good way to cover up, isn't it? Or am I unjust?

I think you should take straw votes of the readers. We want four serials and I think most of us want the old-style covers, although some few of the new ones have been good. Give more subscription contests and things of that kind. Have more of those little articles at the end of stories. Bring back "Men Who Make the ARGOSY."

I am working toward the time when I will have a complete set of ARGOSY and a few of the other better pulps. I have traveled thousands of miles and once I went more than three hundred miles in search of a back issue. But they are scarce as hen's teeth here in south Texas. At present I have about two hundred and twenty-five copies and I sure treasure them.

Please tell Norman Siringer to go back as far as possible with his ratings. Tell him not to discontinue them. Although he and Theodore Mahaffey are certainly not the most polished letter writers that ever appeared on these pages, they rate as number-one Argonotes fans in my opinion.

Alamo, Texas

Note: Since Mr. LeFever took typewriter in hand, ARGOSY has gone back on the three-serial standard. She will stay there—a fact that pleases everyone, including us.

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30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	2.25	1.35
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TIDINGS

Remember "Dead of Night", the Kurt Steel detective novel we published in midsummer? It's out in book form now, and we thought you'd like to know that it's doing nicely with the reviewers. The *New Yorker*, always pretty firm about what it likes and doesn't like in mystery fiction, called Mr. Steel's latest "Clever stuff, and smooth as a greased pig." And Jack Ketch, writing in the *Herald-Tribune*, added his applause.

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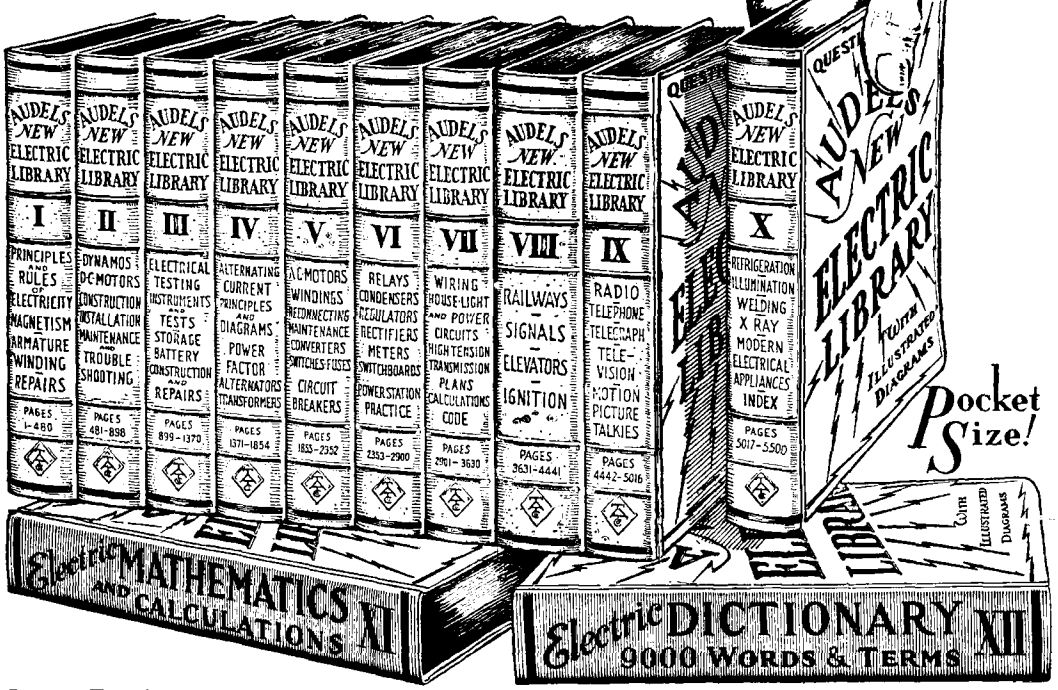

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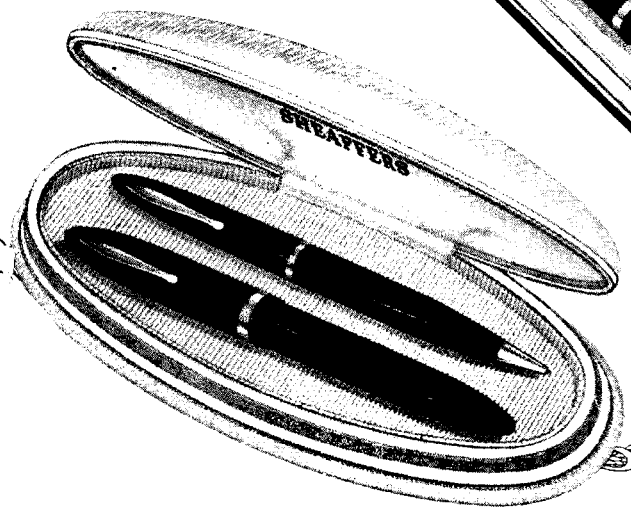
SHEAFFER'S

STATESMAN *Lifetime* Ensemble, $14
ADMIRAL Feathertouch Ensemble, $9
PREMIER *Lifetime* Ensemble, $15

LADY SHEAFFER *Lifetime*
Feathertouch Ensemble, $12.25
SOVEREIGN, $12.75—MILADY, $8.50
Other Ensembles, $3.95 to $19.75



SKRIP-WELL

Uses the Last Drop

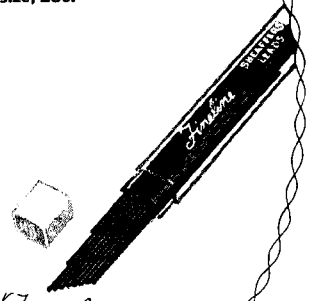
CHEMOPURE
SKRIP, successor to ink, 15c. Economy size, 25c.

THE LASTING LINK BETWEEN HOME, SCHOOL AND FUTURE IS YOUR SHEAFFER'S GIFT

Never have you relaxed in your care and guidance. But now comes the test. YOUR student embarks on a new life. What will be his or her daily reminder of you? Will it be some token that is soon cast aside, or a gift that is worn proudly and used constantly, just as your sentiment is fine and constant? . . . Give YOUR student a Sheaffer's pen gift. Through school and through life, Sheaffer's *Lifetime* Feathertouch, matched with the new Fineline Pencil, is an ever-present aid in realizing every plan and hope—the practical and lasting expression of your lifelong sentiment.

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN CO., FORT MADISON, IOWA; TORONTO, ONT., CAN.

All **LIFETIME** pens are unconditionally guaranteed for the life of the owner except against loss and willful damage—when serviced, if complete pen is returned, subject only to insurance, postage, handling charge—35c.



Fineline
DOUBLE-LENGTH LEADS—Finer, Smoother, Stronger. Regular Pkg. 15c. Economy Pkg. 25c. Developed for Sheaffer by Jos. Dixon Crucible Co.

Unless it's SHEAFFER'S *it isn't a* *Lifetime** - *Know the Pen by this White Dot*

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

*Other companies can guarantee their pens for life—some do—but only Sheaffer pens can carry the trade-mark, "*Lifetime*"

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W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co.

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